The Countess Diane

Henry C. Rowland

THE COUNTESS DIANE

Rader.

"'HOW DO I LOOK?' SHE ASKED"

(p. 76)

The Countess Diane

by Henry C. Rowland

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The Wanderers, etc.

Illustrations & Decorations
by John Rae

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NOT far from the point of Mousterlin, which is west of Beg-Meil, there lies a stretch of Breton beach which the summer folk have not yet invaded. It is a wild and romantic strip of rock and sand with low, tumbling cliffs inclosing sheltered coves no bigger than the inside of a church. Behind the cliffs and, in places, coming down to the sea itself, are the fertile farm lands, dotted with orchards and cut with deep, winding lanes fringed with double rows of pollards.

There are some quaint old farms along this beach; buildings of solid granite and built ever with an eye to strong defense, with battlemented roofs and embrasures for bow or harquebus. It was such an old place that Mr. Archibald Bower Deane, an American by birth and an artist by alleged occupation, had rented for a span of years as a sort of refuge to which he might retreat for the simple life when overworked by a tempestuous season in Paris, Nice or Monte Carlo.

As a matter of fact, his Breton farm was the only place in which Deane ever really worked, and his output from there had been considerable and meritorious. He had converted to his own use two of the outbuildings, one as a studio and the other to live in; the rest of the farm he turned over to an old peasant couple, with a large and robust family of red-cheeked girls, who farmed the place to their profit and catered to the simple wants of Mr. Deane. It was not a businesslike arrangement, but, none the less, was quite satisfactory to all concerned.

For almost a year Mr. Deane had not visited his farm, having been in America to vote, as he told his friends; therefore, imagine his rage and dismay on returning in July to find, about half a mile below his beach, reared on the edge of the sand-dunes, a new and singularly ugly villa of the hideous modern French type, glittering with blatant faience tiles of every color that was bad! Lank and tall and angular, this architectural atrocity reared its painted iron crest from the soft, rolling sand-hills like some uncouth beast which had alighted from another

world. To make matters worse, the misshapen thing seemed penned within a wall of sand and cement, plastered with dirty shells and capped by a chevaux-de-frise of bottle-glass. Whether the object of this wall was to prevent those within from getting out or those without from getting in was the only interesting feature of the whole establishment, and even that seemed easy to answer. One could not conceive of any desire to get in; the outside was sufficient.

When Deane first set eyes upon his neighbor he stopped dead in his tracks and stared, for the moment quite deprived of speech. Then, slowly and sincerely, with classic English words he consigned himself to everlasting torment.

"*Whee, M'sieu'!*" said Corentine, one of the buxom farm girls, who was swinging easily along with Deane's trunk upon her head. "Is it not a beautiful house! Never I have seen such colors!"

"Nor I," said Deane solemnly. "Who did it?"

"It is the property of Per Guillenec, who owns all of the land toward Benodet, and it

is the design of his son, Ba'zour, who has been studying in architecture."

"It looks it," said Deane. So great was his disgust that for the moment he was half minded to leave his luggage unpacked and return to Paris the following day.

"Of course, no one lives there," he observed to the peasant girl. It seemed to the artist as if a hungry dog would flee howling at the sight of the house.

"Mais whee, M'sieu'." The fresh-cheeked Corentine turned and smiled at him from beneath the trunk. "M'sieu' will have neighbors, but it is true that so far one has seen little of them. There are four: old M'sieu', a man older even than Per Guillenec, and old Madame; then there is an old man-servant and"—Corentine's dark eyes sparkled mischievously — "the beautiful young lady."

"The—what?" demanded Deane, holding the door of his cottage open for the girl to pass through.

"Hu'il" Corentine swung down the heavy trunk as lightly as if it had been a sack of grain, straightened her back, threw

out her bosom, and placing her hands on her hips looked at the master and laughed.

"*Gaste!* M'sieu' is interested!" She nodded her coiffed head until the frills shook. "*Whee*—there is a very beautiful young lady—but one seldom sees her because she goes out only very early and again at twilight, but"—she laughed again—"she is never unattended. It is a pity! Shall I unpack M'sieu's trunk?"

"Yes. What makes you think that this young lady must be beautiful, Corentine? Because she is so hard to see?"

"Ah, M'sieu', I have seen her three times —*la-la-la*—what pretty, new shirts has M'sieu'—and her eyes are like the sea when it is growing dark, a blue that is almost black —and M'sieu's new stockings; *la-la*—they are all of silk? *Whee,* and the young lady's lips are very red and she has a great many very white teeth. Then her hair is like the copper we boil the chestnuts in and far longer than mine—and nobody knows better than M'sieu' himself the thickness of *my* hair!" Corentine tossed her pretty head. Deane had once succeeded in posing her un-

coiffed, a great concession for a Bretonne, and the girl had always pretended to resent it. *"Gaste!"* she continued, "the hair of Mademoiselle is to *my* hair like a shower of gold to a horse's tail!"

The following morning Deane passed the new house on his way down the beach. At close range it seemed to him even uglier, if such a thing were possible; moreover, it presented that expression of sullen aloofness peculiar to some houses just as it is to the people who are apt to live in them. A shipwrecked mariner dragging himself out of the brine at its gates would never have rapped upon them to ask for succor. There was also to the place an air of covert watchfulness; with shutters half closed it looked like a painted woman peering under lowered eyelids, while its extreme height gave the air of being on tiptoes in an effort to survey the surrounding country from the shelter of its hideous wall.

No sign of life came from any part of it until Deane was abreast of the gate, the grille of which was open, permitting a vista of hot inclosure. Then through the silent,

blazing sunlight came the deep-toned notes of a striking clock; eleven times it struck, slowly, mournfully, and the last tone was dissolved in a silence which contrasted grotesquely with the brightness of the morning, the vivid colors of sea and sky and shore, and the clear notes of the snipe and curlew circling the marsh.

A week or two passed, and Deane, in the interest of his work, grew indifferent to his ugly neighbor. Sometimes, when he went down to the sea for his morning dip not too late, he would catch a glimpse of figures on the beach toward Benodet, but his absorption in a water-color which he was doing of Corentine *en sardinière* quite obliterated all thought of his neighbors.

One day he received a note from a fellow-painter at Beg-Meil asking him to go over and criticise some of his recent work. Deane, feeling the need of a relaxation, put away his painting things and started up the beach on his long walk to the place, which from being originally a sort of artistic Arcady had developed into a summer resort. On his arrival, hot and tired and thirsty, Deane was

somewhat disgusted to discover that his colleague had gone to Concarneau for the day, taking the key to his studio with him. He dropped into a chair at one of the little tables on the terrace garden, and had just given his order when his name was joyously shouted from somewhere above his head, and looking up he discovered, leaning over the railing of a balcony to the infinite danger of diving on to the table, his most intimate friend and playmate, Mr. Samuel Smalley, of New York and Paris.

"Hello, Sam!" called Mr. Deane, instinctively edging from under. "Come down by the stairs—there's lots of time."

Mr. Smalley quickly complied, and a moment later was sitting opposite his friend.

"What are you doing down here, Sam?" inquired Mr. Deane.

"Oh, just riding around on the car and looking for trouble. I came to this place especially to hunt for you."

"I do not care for the implied association," observed Deane. "What do you plan, now that you have found me?"

"A whirl along the Côte d'Emeraud; Di-

nan and Dinard and St. Malo and the Mount. Afterward Trouville—if there's anything left."

"Of what? Trouville or ourselves? Whom have you with you?"

"No one but an ass of a chauffeur I imported from England. I don't dare let him drive, because in a tight place he always turns to the left. All of my friends are either dead, married or working. Pack up a bag and come along. There's a good chap."

"Very well," answered Mr. Deane, who required but little time to resolve upon a change of scene. "Come over and stop the night with me and we will talk it over and map out our route. There are a lot of people we know at Dinan: Jim Cutting and Schuyler and Randal, and all that crowd."

"We'll look 'em up, God bless 'em!" said Mr. Smalley.

The two friends went out to the garage, where they found the chauffeur leaning upon the hood of the motor, smoking, and talking Cockney French to one of the maids. If any work had been done upon the car, a

big 50-horse-power touring car, it was not apparent.

"Fill the tanks, then crank up and get in behind!" commanded Mr. Smalley, and the chauffeur, being far from home and in a foreign land, obeyed without remark. Smalley stepped into the office to settle his account.

"You know the road and you know the car, Archie," he said as he came out. "Get in and drive."

Deane obeyed with a thrill of pleasure; he took considerable pride in the skill with which he handled his friends' cars, and therefore he was especially annoyed at what immediately followed. The gate of the yard opened upon the road at right angles, a high wall hiding anything which might be passing from either direction, so Deane started out on his low speed, horning vigorously as he reached the gate. But before the blare had ceased, a big limousine car, running silently as a watch, swung in from the road directly upon them.

The driver was quick as he was reckless; like a flash he threw on his emergency brake

and at the same time swerved sharply in an effort to cross the road ahead of Deane and go into the wall, which would have given him another few metres in which to stop. Deane had, of course, braked and would have escaped all injury had not the other man, apparently fearing a skid which would smash him against the other car broadside on, swung sharply back again. He was almost at a stop, however, and his big machine slid gently against the other car; there was a crash, a slight jar, and at the same moment Deane, who had reversed as quickly as was possible, backed slowly away and stopped. As he did so he observed that the crash had come from the lens of one of the other car's acetylene lights, and at the same time he saw that a large triangular chunk had been gouged from the shoe of its left front tire.

The next instant the two young men were treated to an interesting exhibition of Slavic temper. The man driving was a bearded individual of enormous physique, very evidently a Russian noble, while beside him sat apparently his chauffeur, a small man of

Slavic features, which were for the moment blanched with terror. The big man swung quickly down from behind the steering-wheel and stepped in front of his damaged car. No word escaped his lips, but the two men could see the gleam of his teeth through his bristling beard, while his small, blue eyes were dancing and twinkling like those of a bear rearing itself to strike, and there was an odd, gurgling noise coming from deep in his throat.

He glanced at the broken lamp, jerked a hanging fragment from the tear in the tire, which was still inflated, then, still in the same ominous and potential silence, he turned and stared at his trembling chauffeur, who had jumped down and was standing beside the motor.

"Well—idiot!" snarled the big man in French. "Why did you not horn?"

The man shrank back. "I did not know that Monsieur was going to turn in," he stammered.

The words had no sooner left the man's lips than his master's great fist flew out, striking him heavily in the face. Backward

went the chauffeur across the motor-hood; then as he struggled to regain his feet his master struck him again a swinging blow, and would no doubt have repeated it if Mr. Smalley had not slipped down from his seat and seized him by the shoulder.

"That's enough!" he cried in French. "Do you want to kill the man?"

The Russian turned upon him with the growl of a trapped grizzly. With one sweep of his great arm he swept the young man aside and then, stepping forward, struck at him savagely. It was an unscientific blow, such as might be dealt by a gorilla: a blow dealt downward and inward with the inside of the fist. Smalley saw it coming and sprang back; then before the Russian could recover his poise he stepped quickly forward and with all of the force and accuracy of a trained boxer he placed so solid an uppercut on the base of the heavy jaw that, massive as was the anatomy of the Russian, the shock staggered him. He reeled, tottered, then sat with a thud on the road.

"My h'eye!" cried Smalley's cockney from the tonneau. "That were a sleepin'

powder for 'is w'iskers! 'Ook 'im in the h'eye when 'e gets 'is legs, sir!"

Mr. Smalley looked toward his friend and grinned. The big Russian was still resting in the middle of the road.

"I suppose I ought to wait for his card——"

"You get back in the car as quick as you can!" answered Deane. "Do you want to get mixed up in a *procès-verbal* and spend the next six weeks in this hole? Hurry, before he finds out what hit him!"

Somewhat reluctantly Mr. Smalley stepped aboard his car, Deane threw in the clutch, and a moment later they were humming down the road.

"You may be a millionaire, Sam," observed his friend, "but you are not rich enough to afford slugging people here in France. I once boxed the ears of a hotel-keeper; it did him no harm and me no good, but it cost fifteen hundred francs."

"Yes," assented Mr. Smalley, "I should have kicked him. That is much less expensive."

The big car quickly devoured the distance

to Deane's farm. As it was still early in the afternoon the host suggested to his friend that they go for a swim. There was a little cove some distance down the beach where Deane sometimes went to sketch, and there he proposed that they should bathe. To get there it was necessary to pass the new villa, and as they drew abreast of the ugly edifice Mr. Smalley paused and contemplated it long and curiously.

"That is, without exception, the very worst that I have ever seen!" said he. "Do the inhabitants look like it?"

"Corentine tells me that there is a beautiful young lady, with eyes like the sea when it grows dark, hair like a shower of gold, and a great many very white teeth," answered Deane; "but, as Corentine also greatly admires the house, I have not allowed myself to become excited."

They resumed their walk along the beach. Presently Mr. Smalley raised his eyes from a scrutiny of the sand.

"Does the beautiful young lady ever paddle about barefooted?" he asked with interest.

"I do not know," answered Deane. He glanced down and saw some imprints on the sand. "Do you think that you have struck her trail?"

"That is in my mind," admitted Smalley. "There has been a barefooted young lady along this beach not more than fifteen minutes ago. The tide is falling and you can see that these tracks are not far from the water's edge."

Deane paused and examined the footprints carefully.

"Those were made by a child," he observed.

"You are a poor tracker," said Smalley. "These are *not* the footprints of a child; they are the footprints of a young and beautiful woman with long, bare legs!"

Deane regarded his friend with skeptic irony. "Why long and bare?" he asked.

"You are more at home on the Champs Élysées than you would be on the trail, Archie," observed Mr. Smalley with condescension. "Now, *I* am a hunter—a tracker. If you look here where the sand is firm you will see that between the heel and the ball of

the foot it has not been touched. A child's foot would have made a flatter and wider print. Now in regard to the legs; my own are fairly long and unhampered by skirts, yet walking naturally these prints are spaced as far apart as mine are."

Mr. Deane regarded his friend with growing admiration.

"What was she thinking about when she passed here, Sam?" he inquired respectfully.

"She was thinking of you."

"Of *me!* How nice of her!"

"Yes," said Mr. Smalley excitedly, "and I can prove it! Every few metres she has looked back over her shoulder—her right shoulder. See where she has toed in with her left foot? She was probably afraid that you might see her and follow her."

"Get out!" said Deane resentfully; nevertheless he studied the small, dainty prints with a curious excitement.

"She's run away—that's what she's done!" he announced. "Corentine said that she never went out unattended. I'll bet the poor girl has played hookey and gone off for a little lark all by herself!"

Suddenly the footprints vanished, the girl having apparently waded in the shallow water.

Deane felt sorry in a vague sort of way. There had been for him something pleasing and pathetic in the mute companionship of the dainty little prints which looked so very much alone upon that wild and desolate strip of beach.

When presently the prints emerged again, dropping apparently from the sky, he was quite delighted.

"Maybe they were left by an angel," he observed.

"Perhaps," assented Smalley. "Sometimes they are. Whatever she is, I'll bet that we find her behind those rocks just ahead."

"That is where I had planned to bathe," said Deane; "but if she is there we will make a detour so as not to disturb her. Think what it must be, Sam, for a girl to be penned up in a coop like that thing we passed. If she's given her keepers the slip *we* don't want to spoil her little fun."

"All right," replied Smalley. "We will

go up quietly, and, if she is there, clear out without letting her see us."

They quietly approached the ledge of rock which shut off all view of the beach ahead. Deane was leading the way through a fissure in the cliff, when suddenly he stopped and raised a warning hand.

Less than ten paces from them was a young girl intently absorbed in digging in the sand for *échille*. She was apparently a very young girl, not over eighteen years, but tall and with the strong, graceful figure of one of Diana's wood-nymphs. She wore a quaint, old-fashioned Empire gown, short-sleeved, and with the skirt pinned up above her round, dimpled knees. From where they stood the two men saw her in profile; a face flushed and eager beneath a great, tumbled mass of golden-copper hair which was caught up in a loose knot and held by a black velvet ribbon. Beneath were a retroussé nose, a very flushed cheek, red lips tightly compressed from her exertions, and a small, firm chin. Even as they looked she threw one of the slippery little fish up on the tip of her pointed spade, and then there was a

frantic scramble which ended in her catching it before it could dart away beneath the surface of the wet sand. With flashing smile of triumph she dropped it into her tiny bucket, and Deane thought of Corentine's description of the "great many very white teeth."

He reached behind him, prodded his friend, and the two backed noiselessly out the way they had entered.

"Corentine was right," said Smalley, as they headed for the sand-dunes to make a detour of the cove. "Prettiest girl that ever *I* saw."

"You can never think of anything but a girl's looks, Sam," said Deane reprovingly. "What impressed *me* was the pathos of the picture—that lovely girl having such a glorious time all alone there on this desolate beach! Think of a splendid young creature like that being penned up in that vile mustard-box back there! Did you see her smile when she caught that wretched little fish? Did you ever see such color in a woman's hair?—and such a ravishing profile? And speaking from a purely professional point

of view, if I could get her on a canvas——"

"And yet," interrupted Mr. Smalley, "what appealed to *you,* Archie, was the *pathos* of the girl, not her beauty."

"Well, *isn't* it pathetic to think of such a lovely girl having such a ripping good time doing what would bore most women to death? All alone——"

"You keep dwelling so much on her loneliness," interrupted Mr. Smalley, "that I should think that you would go and join her."

"I would not run the risk of spoiling one happy hour of hers for any selfish reason, Sam," said Deane moodily; "but"—he brightened—"I suppose that it *would* be only civil for me to go and call some time."

"We might go to-night," suggested Smalley. "She might not be here when you get back from your tour with me."

Deane looked extremely uncomfortable.

"I am afraid that I was a bit hasty in agreeing to take this trip with you, Sam," said he. "To tell the truth, I have really no

right to go. I really ought to make a stab at the Salon this year if I am ever going to."

"All right," said Smalley, so readily that Deane looked at him with suspicion. "Stay here, if you would rather—and I say, if you don't mind, I believe I'd like to stop with you for a bit. There is a great deal about this place which appeals to me."

He looked thoughtfully toward the cove which they had just left.

"You are always to consider my house as your home, Sam," answered Deane; "but I am afraid that you would find it very dull. I am quite a different person when I get down seriously to work; scarcely have a word to say."

Mr. Smalley grinned, but did not reply, and the two friends, making a detour beyond the head of the cove, struck the beach below, and were soon romping like two porpoises far out in the blue, sparkling water.

As they were dressing there came to them, borne faintly on the breeze, the noise of a rapidly-running motor.

"That's funny," said Deane. "Could we hear your car at this distance?"

"We might, but"—Smalley pricked up his ears and listened—"that does not sound to me like my car. Is there a road near us?"

"There is a broad lane which comes down to the beach from the Benodet Road, but the only ones to use it are the people in that new house. No one would drive a car there, especially as one must wade through two feet of water to cross the lagoon back of the beach. It doesn't matter with a horse and cart, but the salt water would not do any good to machinery."

"Listen!" cried Smalley, raising one hand. "Did you hear that?"

"The engine is slowing——"

"No, starting—that is, he just threw in his clutch; but that is not what I meant. I thought that I heard a cry—a scream."

"I heard that. It was a gull."

Mr. Smalley shook his head. "It did not sound to me like a gull—but it was so far away—— Come on; are you ready?"

They started back along the edge of the beach. The tide was far out, the sun was getting low, and its vivid, slanting rays struck the glistening expanse of wet sand

and painted it in varying opalescent hues. Beyond was the white zone of breaking wavelets, for the sea was still, then a broad band of deepest blue, dotted in the distance by the many-colored sails of the returning fishing fleet, beating up to Concarneau against the faint land-breeze.

"I suppose that our little friend has gone," observed Smalley. "It must be getting late——" He stopped suddenly in his tracks.

"*I* heard it that time!" said Deane, looking uneasily at his friend; "and it *was* a scream! There goes that blooming motor again! What do you suppose the fellow is trying to do?"

They listened for a moment while the sounds of the rapidly running car became fainter and fainter, died quite away, returned again, then were swallowed up in the distance.

"He's driving fast——" began Mr. Smalley, when Deane interrupted him.

"There's something about it I don't like——" he began nervously. Smalley looked at him in surprise.

"About what—what do you mean?"

"Oh—I don't know. The whole thing. That girl out on this wild beach all alone, then that motor buzzing around where no motor has ever been before—and the scream——" He started to trot up the beach. Smalley, with a glance of startled comprehension, fell in beside him.

They passed between the sea and the cove, now empty, where they had seen the girl, and then upon the other side they picked up her returning trail. All at once Smalley, who was looking ahead, gripped Deane by the arm.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to an object lying on the sand.

"Her spade!" cried Deane, and a thrill of alarm rippled through him. "She must have thrown it aside!" He looked inquiringly at his friend.

"She began to run here," said Smalley. He stopped and examined the prints carefully. "You see, here she stopped to look over there"—he pointed toward the sand-dunes flanking the beach—"then she turned and dug out as hard as she could go." He

trotted ahead on the girl's widely-spaced prints. "Here it occurred to her to throw away her *échille* spade—keep right on with this trail, Archie; I want to look higher up on the beach!"

With an ugly sense of apprehension Deane continued on the girl's trail. A shout from Smalley warned him that something had been discovered, and glancing in his direction Deane saw with a growing alarm that his friend was running another trail which converged to meet that made by the girl. Closer together they came, then suddenly, when less than a half-dozen paces apart, the girl's tracks turned sharply and made for the water. There were a few washed imprints at what had been the water's edge, then they ceased entirely, nor were there any more in sight. Just above them the other tracks disappeared in the same manner.

Deane stared at his friend with a white face. The whole story of the pursuit was up to this point so obvious; then, at the crucial moment, when the pursuer was closing in upon his desperate quarry, the calm, inscrutable sea had silently effaced all records.

"Look here, Archie!" called Mr. Smalley. "What do you make of this?"

Deane hurried to the spot and studied the big, square-toed footprints which were cut sharply and clearly in the firm sand.

"It was a big man——" he began slowly, but Smalley interrupted:

"A *very* big man! Compare his tracks with mine. The foot is half again as big and it has sunk twice as deeply, and the sand was firmer then than it is now that it has dried out a bit more!"

"And to think," groaned Deane, "that we were almost within hail! We *were* within hail, but were probably splashing around in the water when this was going on! Come on—let's see where they came out!"

They started up the beach on a run. "I think," panted Smalley, "that the girl was running in the shallow water, because the footing was a little firmer—see these grooves —yes——"

"There they are, just ahead!" said Deane.

Apparently from nowhere came the broad, deep footprints of the pursuer, sharply defined, deep, and spaced as in walking slowly.

But the barefooted prints of the girl were nowhere to be seen.

Deane stared at his friend with a white face and eyes big with horror. Here came the trail of the pursuer straight from the sea and up across the beach in the direction of the sand-dunes.

The unswerving track had an expression of cold finality, of the chase being finished beyond the need of further effort, the quarry either escaped or destroyed and the hunter betaking himself away. Deane glanced out to sea and shivered. The water was getting darker; the bright yellows and reds and browns of the sails of the sardiniers glowed out against a lee set of gray cloud-bank. The late summer sun was nearing the edge of a far-distant point.

"Could he have drowned her—or perhaps she drowned herself—swam far out rather than be taken——" Deane began huskily. He turned and started to run up the beach.

"Come back, my son!" called Mr. Smalley. "You will not find her trail up there!"

"Why not?" asked Deane, pausing.

"Because—he's *carrying her!*"

"What?"

"Sure of it! See the way he has gouged up the sand? Come on—we can soon tell. She was a big girl—wasn't she?"

"A very big girl," said Deane.

They turned and hurried off on the new scent. Straight up it went, over the sand-dunes, plowing through the tough grass up the steep incline with its heavy, shifting foothold.

"Oh, come!" cried Deane despairingly. "No man living could carry that girl over a place like this without setting her down to rest."

Smalley looked doubtful, then shook his head.

"This was a very powerful man," he said. "In fact"—a peculiar note crept into his voice—"I have seen but one man in France who impressed me as being capable of such a feat of strength!" He threw a sidelong glance at his friend. Deane's gray eyes opened very wide.

"That Russian!"

"Yes. Come on; we can soon tell."

"And the automobile we heard!" cried Deane. "He is heading for the place where that lane comes out!"

They dashed ahead, following the trail as it crossed a sandy, thistle-covered stretch heading for the lagoon, which was now bare, the tide being low. Here the tracks disappeared again, the man having waded. On the far side they reappeared, and there also, as they had expected, they found the hard sand gouged by the wheels of an automobile. The car had backed and turned, the driver taking care not to run it into the salt water, and the space for this manœuvre had been limited, as was shown by the zigzags where he had started and reversed.

"You are right, Sam," observed Deane, as he studied the markings. "It is the Russian." He pointed to a raised, triangular elevation in the track of one of the wheels. "He took that chunk out on our front spring or crank or something. Now if we could only be sure about the girl!" His eyes examined minutely all of the details of the

place, and as they did so fell upon a small, black object hanging from a thistle. With a quick thrill he stooped to examine it, and his heart gave a mighty thump as he discovered it to be the black velvet hair-ribbon worn by the girl.

"A straight case of abduction!" observed Mr. Smalley, as he turned the ribbon in his hand. "Now what?"

"We must let her people know," said Deane. "There is evidently something behind it all—some reason or motive beyond mere kidnaping. No doubt she was kept here in hiding from this animal."

"Perhaps he is her husband," suggested Mr. Smalley with malice.

"Don't be an ass, Sam," retorted Deane sharply. "Any one could see at a glance at her face that the girl is a perfect innocent. What do you want to suggest horrors like that for, anyway?"

"As a possible motive. Perhaps he only wants to marry her to somebody else."

"I don't see why you should have to harp so on the marriage idea," said Deane irri-

tably. "It's much more apt to be a question of money. Let's go to the house and see what they have to say about it there."

They recrossed the lagoon and hurried up the beach to the new house which reared itself in garish loneliness, its villainously-colored tiles ablaze in the late sunlight and defying coarsely the soft tints of sea and sky and the sweetly subdued richness in the tone of the heaving sand-hills. There it stood, unfaithful to its trust, like some painted courtezan flaunting her colors in defiant desolation, vulgar yet pathetic, prideful, abandoned, alone.

Deane gave the bell-cord a tug which set the whole place clattering and jangling hideously, but only the discordant echoes came from the silent house.

"Try again," said Mr. Smalley; "then chuck a rock through the window. I'm sure that would be less offensive than that bell."

Deane gave another tug, and again the vile bell clamored, but with no response.

"Let's kick in the gate," suggested Smalley. Deane promptly acted on this advice, and the heavy gate being unbarred and held

only by a feeble latch, they were quickly inside the court.

"Either no one is at home," observed Smalley, "or else they think that we have come to cut their throats, and are, perhaps, at this minute drawing a bead on us from the cracks in those iron shutters."

"Oh, puff!" said Deane. "It is just as I thought. There is nobody at home. They have all gone off and left the girl alone, so she took it into her head to have a little outing of her own. You can't tell; very possibly they were bribed by this beast to clear out!"

"That also is possible," assented Mr. Smalley. "The matter as it now stands is resolved into a single query: What are we going to do about it?"

A look of determination had appeared upon the thoroughbred features of Mr. Deane. The habitual expression of lazy indifference had been displaced by one of dominant alertness, quite new to his friend. Also the drawling, mocking tones of his voice had vanished, giving way to a note of new and unsuspected masterfulness.

"That is a foolish and unnecessary question, Sam," he answered sternly. "There can possibly be but one thing for us to do, and that is to rescue her!"

"Really?"

"Yes. Whoever this Russian may be, and no matter what his relations are to the girl, the fact remains that he has dragged her off by force and against her will. It is up to us to rescue her first and ask questions afterward. Come on——"

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Smalley. "I hear a noise!"

The sound of scratching became audible at a window behind them and was followed by a plaintive "mee-aow!"

"Let the poor beast out," said Smalley. Deane tried the shutter, which was unlocked, and throwing it open discovered a large tortoise-shell cat sitting upon the window-sill. Much to his surprise the window itself was also unfastened. He threw it open, when the cat leaped out and began to rub against his legs. But something just within the room had caught the young man's eye. Upon a decorative easel stood an exquisitely

DEANE

painted head of the girl herself. It was scarcely more than a study, but masterly in style and a likeness, as she might have looked at sixteen. In one corner of the canvas was inscribed in thin lettering:

La Comtesse Diane Roubanoff.
Compliment de Léon Marceau.

"The Countess Diane Roubanoff," cried Deane in amazement. "Why, Sam, wasn't it a Count Roubanoff whom that Baltimore beauty, Daisy Fairfax, married about twenty years ago?"

"Yes; she was a relation of mine. You know he was killed in the late unpleasantness with Japan. Used to be in the diplomatic service."

Deane grabbed his friend by the arm and pushed him in front of the window.

"Look at that," he said excitedly. "That girl is a relative of yours, Sam! a relative, by gad, and here she has been kidnaped under your very nose, poor thing!"

Mr. Smalley stared and his lean jaw dropped. Suddenly he banged the shutter and started for the gate.

"Come on, Archie," he called back over his shoulder. "We have fooled away too much time already." He started off on a trot, Deane falling in at his side.

"That's Daisy Fairfax's daughter—no doubt of that!" said Mr. Smalley, as he toiled along through the sand. "Her mother died ten years ago—they say he ill-used her; those beggars usually do!"

"Good thing you filled your tank!" puffed Deane. "Do you think that we ought to inform the police?"

"Not yet; the dog may have some legal claim on her—guardian or something. Our play is to steal her back again if we can and then see how we stand afterward. He will not have more than an hour's start and we can go two kilometres to his one. Besides, he is shy a lamp, and it's a dark night—or will be."

"True, *mon gars,* and that *wagon lit* he is driving will not do much over these hills. If he is going east he will strike out for Rennes, and in any case he is almost sure to pass through Rosporden. When we learn

which way he has turned from there we can be pretty sure whether he is lining out for Paris or going north or south. That one searchlight of his will make it easy to follow him; they are sure to notice it at the octroi stations."

"We can follow his track with my headlights," puffed Mr. Smalley, upon whom the pace set by his enthusiastic friend was beginning to tell, "and if we see any indication of his turning off from the post-road we can look for that tear mark." He slackened his pace. "Hold up, Archie; suppose we come down to our first through this sand. Let's wait and do our hurrying after we get in the car."

"The Countess Diane," murmured Deane reflectively. "Lovely name, Diane. Fits her, too, don't you think?"

"Yes. What are your plans after we rescue her?"

"Why—eh—no doubt they will be governed largely by circumstances——"

"They usually are. I suppose that in the end I will probably have to marry her just for the look of the thing." Mr. Smalley

turned away his large, bony features to hide a grin.

"Oh, puff!" growled Deane. "Can't you think of anything but getting the poor girl married? Think of that lovely, innocent child being locked up in a limousine with that hairy brute of a Slav! And she was having such a good time——" Deane's usually placid voice grew suddenly fierce. "I swear, I hope to get out of this thing without a fight, Sam, but if the worst comes to the worst I'll not stop at beating in that brute's head with a crowbar!"

"Oh, very well—only be sure that there *is* a crowbar before you start," said Mr. Smalley. "I almost smashed *my* fist without doing any damage to speak of, and I put it right in the best place, too. It would have been a 'down and outer' for most men, but this beggar gets up and runs across about a kilometre and a half of loose sand with a big, heavy girl in his arms. *You* can toy with him next time, Archie."

On arriving at the farm the two men learned that the chauffeur had kindly offered to assist Glodina, a rosy-cheeked sis-

ter of Corentine, in driving home the sheep, which were pastured at a considerable distance.

"The little beast!" growled Smalley. "We're lucky, though, that he didn't take her in the car. He'd have done so if there'd been any road!"

"Never mind," said Deane. "There will be one less to pay hush-money to, and we don't need him anyway. Let's slip on some clothes and get away. I'll have one of the girls put us up some sandwiches to nibble on the road."

A few minutes later the big car with Deane driving, for his friend was a trifle incommoded by a sore right hand, rolled heavily out of the winding lane and, striking the smooth highway, turned its nose eastward in hot pursuit of the abducted Countess Diane.

II

IT was growing dark when the big touring car swung out upon the Benodet Road, so Deane stopped and Smalley got down and lit the lamps.

"There have been several cars past here," he observed, glancing at the road.

"There is no use in trying to pick up his trail till we get to Rosporden," said Deane. "He is almost sure to go that way. What *I* think is that he will put up for the night at some obscure little place along the road. He will hardly attempt to drive that box straight through to Paris. Jump in and we will unhook a little speed."

Mr. Smalley complied. Deane proceeded to unhook until the powerful engines which had seemed to fret and kick and hammer at restraint settled down with a droning hum to their splendid work, and the big car swept

on until the wind began to tear past the well-protected faces of the two men and the kilometre stones fled by, seventy, eighty, ninety and even a hundred to the hour where a good, clean tangent, unmarred by curve or too much grade, gave opportunity. But for the most part their course was a series of swift rushes and quick slowings of speed, for the road, while fine, like all French roads, was hilly and often tortuous.

On they flew, the motor running like a watch and the powerful light holding up for sharp inspection every minute detail of the roadbed. They skimmed along high ridges where the country beneath lay dark and mysterious, with tiny lights pricking out the resting hamlets; they plunged into sombre forests where the searchlights seemed to bore a blazing hole between the tree-trunks for the passage of the car; they dipped into fragrant valleys where the witch-mist hung from the willows and a trout-stream splashed noisily over its rocky bed. Almost before they realized that they were fairly started Rosporden was reached, and there they learned that their quarry had passed through

and turned northward on leaving the village.

"That settles it," said Deane. "He's going by the Côtes du Nord. That means a wild run through some very rough country. He can never have been through there or he wouldn't tackle it in that Bois de Boulogne limousine!"

"All the better for us," said Smalley. "He will be easier to trail, and we will catch him all the sooner."

"He will probably skirt along the edge of the Montagnes Noires, then strike across for Lamballe," said Deane, shoving up his speed as the powerful car vigorously breasted a long up-grade. "We will have to make our big gains hill-climbing; the turns in the road hold down our speed on the levels."

The lights of a village twinkled out ahead, and the big horn blared out its warning. This and the terrifying roar of the motor as Deane opened up the muffler had cleared the main street even before it was set blazing in the twin beams of the powerful reflectors, and they swept through like a cyclone in a

chaos of reverberations, thrown back by the double row of buildings and a syncopated chorus of barks and cries.

"We mustn't get arrested!" shouted Smalley.

"Never mind if we do!" answered Deane. "You will not know anything about it until you get back to Paris, and then all that you have to do is to pay!"

The next village they approached more quietly, and on stopping to inquire at several places learned that the other car had preceded them by half an hour.

"That 'cross-country hack has got speed possibilities you wouldn't credit her with," said Smalley. "Must have a husky old engine!"

"He's done well," admitted Deane. "I wouldn't care to drive the thing up and down these hills as he must have. He is evidently in a hurry, and he wants to get off the main routes. I don't like it—not one bit." And once again the speed was lifted until Smalley, who was not driving, began to think about his soul. Being, however, possessed of a certain philosophy, it sud-

denly occurred to him that he had not dined, and reaching in his pocket he hauled out the light lunch prepared by Corentine, and munched away with the consoling reflection that a man meets death as cheerfully on a full stomach as upon an empty one.

Having eaten and refreshed himself, Mr. Smalley insisted upon taking his turn at driving, and Deane was reluctantly forced to comply. Being too excited to eat or drink, he sat and stared ahead at the swiftly unfolding road until the whole became a swimming void, against which appeared the ravishing picture of the Countess Diane.

Wilder and more rugged grew the country. Great tumbling hills barren of trees reared blackly against the sombre sky. The road grew steeper and more tortuous, sometimes skirting a forest-filled valley from which arose the sullen roar of a cataract, or winding across bleak moor-land covered with bracken and studded with black granite boulders. It was the poorest and most desolate part of France, and such houses as they passed were mere hovels thrown up upon the roadside. Amidst these most depressing

surroundings, where but little work was to be expected of the *cantonniers,* they began to have tire troubles, and lost almost an hour in shifting and mending inner tubes.

By midnight they were getting into a better country again, and were encouraged to learn from a pedler whom they overtook that the other car was less than three-quarters of an hour ahead.

"Looks as if he were holding straight on for the coast," said Deane. "Perhaps he's got a house of his own somewhere."

At Lamballe, which they reached shortly after midnight, they learned that the other car had just preceded them, the chauffeur inquiring for the road to Dinan. Two kilometres outside the town, as they emerged from a heavy grove of chestnuts they saw on a turn ahead a bright beam of light which blazed out, spraying the treetops with a weird, unearthly brilliance.

"There he is!" cried Smalley.

"He has stopped," answered Deane.

"What shall we do?" Mr. Smalley threw out the clutch and let the car roll down the incline.

"Stop a little this side and let me go and talk to him. He might recognize you."

About fifty paces behind the other car Mr. Smalley brought his car to a stop and Deane stepped down and walked ahead. Two dark figures were in the road at the side of the car, and the artist saw that the left hind-wheel was jacked up and that the smaller man was breaking out his extra shoe.

"You are in difficulty, Monsieur?" inquired Deane, saluting.

"We have torn a shoe on these accursed flints," answered the big man, somewhat stiffly saluting in turn.

"Perhaps we can be of service," said Deane, stepping to the side of the car.

"If Monsieur is not in haste," said the chauffeur, "he could accommodate us greatly by the loan of his pump. The valves of our own leak badly."

"With pleasure," said Deane. "We are in no hurry whatever."

He walked back to where Mr. Smalley was waiting in some excitement.

"They want to borrow our pump," said

Deane. "I can't see into the limousine very well, but there is some one inside. Just wait here and if you get a cue from me don't stop to ask questions. Of course," he concluded as he pulled out the pump, "if you hear a row you don't need to wait to be introduced."

"All right, Professsor," answered Mr. Smalley cheerfully. "Give me a cigar and then bulge in."

Taking the pump, Deane returned to the other car. The Russian had mounted to the driver's seat, where he sat muttering impatiently at the delay and tugging at his heavy mustache.

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" he said shortly. "You are most kind. As soon as we have finished I well send my man back with the pump."

"It is nothing," answered Deane, ignoring the implied suggestion that he return and wait in his own car. "Perhaps I can be of further assistance."

"There is nothing more, thank you," growled the Russian. Deane, apparently not noticing his gruffness, walked around the car as if inspecting it. He did not fail

to observe the owner's nervous irritation at his lingering.

"*Vite—vite!*" he snarled at his mechanician.

"*Oui, oui, Monsieur!*" panted the frightened man.

"You have a very heavy car for this country," observed Deane casually. He stepped forward to look at the carosserie. The Russian made a quick, involuntary gesture as though to stop him, then recovered himself and swore beneath his breath.

Deane's eyes tried to pierce the gloom within the vehicle, but all that he could distinguish was a dark mass of rugs in the far corner. He stepped close to the side of the car as if to get a shield from the wind, placed a cigar between his lips and, with his face close to the window, struck a fusee. It flared up brilliantly, being one of the kind made to use in the wind.

"*Sacré!*" growled the Russian in a low fury.

"*Pardon?*" mumbled Deane, without turning. He shielded the match with his hands and threw the light directly into the

vehicle, looked quickly inside, and then, flicking away the match, turned to the Russian.

"May I offer Monsieur a cigar?" he asked. His voice was composed, but his heart was hammering furiously, for in the quick, upward flare of the match he had caught a glimpse of a white face and two wild, terror-stricken eyes. But what had roused the fighting-blood of the young man was the sight of a crimson smear which crossed the forehead and ran down the pallid face.

"Merci! merci!" growled the Russian, with a brusque, negative gesture of his gauntleted hand. "I cannot smoke and drive!" He turned to the chauffeur, who had adjusted the shoe and was connecting the pump. "Hurry, you fool! Hurry, I tell you!"

Deane's mind was working rapidly, grasping plans for a rescue only to throw them aside. He realized the need of swift action, for the chauffeur had almost finished inflating the tire. Presently the man paused an instant.

"*Eh bien!*" snarled his master, who supposed that he had finished. "Start the motor."

The man dropped the pump to crank the engine, which started off with a roar.

"*Dépêchez!*" snarled the Russian. "Give the gentleman his pump and get into the limousine!"

"One moment, Monsieur!" cried the man, and started to violently pump the final remaining strokes. But with the Russian's last few words Deane had all at once received his cue. He hurried back to Mr. Smalley.

"Get down!" whispered Deane fiercely. "Get down, and when this fellow comes with the pump, grab him and stop his mouth. Grab him and stop his mouth, d'you hear?"

The quick-witted Mr. Smalley swung his long, muscular frame lightly to the ground.

"All right!" said he, and slipped quickly out of his ulster; "but look out how you mix it up with the big brute, Archie!"

"Never mind me—I'll be all right. Here he comes now. Just you grab him and stop his gawp; I'll take care of my end." Even

as he spoke he saw the man pick up the pump and come running toward them.

"*V'là, Monsieur. Merci!*" he panted, breathless from his violent exertions. He held out the pump, and the next instant found himself flat upon his back in the road, with Mr. Smalley on top of him and that gentleman's cap smothering the very scanty breath which he had left.

Without even waiting to see that his friend had the upper hand, Deane turned and ran toward the other car, which had already started ahead under its first speed. The noise of the motor would have quite drowned any cries which might have escaped from the unfortunate chauffeur.

"Get in, pig!" snarled the Russian, without looking around.

Deane wrenched open the door and plunged in headlong. At the same time the car sprang forward and threw him against a figure enveloped in a long, heavy ulster.

"*Pardon,*" he muttered, trying to extricate himself. His efforts were assisted with more force than politeness by a vigorous thrust from a strong young pair of arms.

"Get in front, where you belong!" said a fierce but musical voice from the corner. "I will not have you in here!"

Deane clambered into the seat beside the girl.

"Do not make a noise, Mademoiselle," said he. "I am not the chauffeur."

"Not the chauffeur? Who are you, then?"

"I am an American—an artist," answered Deane, feeling slightly foolish, although he could not have told why. "You are the Countess Diane Roubanoff, are you not?"

"And if I am?" answered the low, passionate voice. "Is that any reason why I should have strange men tumbling in beside me?"

"Please, do not speak so loud," said Deane desperately, adding, "You don't seem to understand. I have come to rescue you!"

There was a moment's pause, then a cold voice said in perfect English:

"But I do *not* understand. Why should an American artist want to rescue me?"

"Why — eh — because ——" stammered

Deane in some embarrassment. "Don't you want to be rescued? One would naturally expect a woman who has been forcibly abducted to want to be rescued."

"But who *are* you?" whispered the girl tensely, "and *why* are you so determined to rescue me?"

"I can't very well explain now," said Deane, speaking almost aloud in his vexation. "I should have brought my passport, I suppose. The point is, *do* you want to be rescued? Because if you do I'll arrange it, and if not I'll apologize for my intrusion and clear out."

"What are you talking about?" whispered the girl. "How are you going to arrange it?"

"You leave that to me. My car is following just behind us, and all we have to do is to get out of this and into that. We thought, *of course,* you'd want to be rescued, your Cousin Sam and I."

"My cousin *who?*"

"Your cousin, Sam Smalley. He's an American—related to you on your mother's side. You probably never saw him," mum-

bled Deane. "I *must* say, it seems a bit ungrateful of you, after all the work we've had——"

"I'm sorry," said the girl, "but it's all very puzzling. At any rate, anything is better than being in the power of that beast!" she added with a burst of passion. "You may rescue me, please. What do you want me to do?"

"*Sh-h!*" said Deane, "he is looking back."

The Russian had been driving very slowly and looking back from time to time, evidently wondering what had detained the other car. If he noticed the mumble of voices from the limousine, which was improbable owing to the noise of the motor, he made no sign. Presently he started ahead, and Deane noticed that the motor was not running smoothly and that one of the cylinders kept "missing."

"Who is that man and why did he kidnap you?" he asked, in a low voice.

"He is my legal guardian," said the Countess in a strained voice. "He wants to get me to Russia before I become of age,

which will be in less than a month, as he knows that otherwise he will never get me there at all."

The last words came from between the girl's set teeth.

"In that case," said the artist, "we will attempt to fool him. But we will have to be quick. That engine is going to buck in a minute."

"To what?"

"To stop. When he slows down on the next hill I will open the door. Then, when he shifts his gears, we will slip out and wait for my car. He will not hear us for the racket."

To the amazement of the artist the Countess leaned back and broke into a soft, rippling laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Deane suspiciously.

"What a lark!" she whispered, her lips close to his ear. "I would give a good deal to see Ivan Kharkof's face when he finds that he has been driving an empty car."

"Is that Prince Kharkof?" asked Deane quickly.

"Yes. Did you not know? He is a terrible man. Don't you think that you had better change your mind?"

"I know him by reputation," said Deane doggedly; "and what I know makes me all the more determined to get you out of his hands. Isn't this a hill in front of us?"

A black rampart loomed suddenly ahead, and presently the pitch of the car and the labored beat of the engine told them that they had begun to climb. The Prince had gone back to "second," and presently Deane saw his bulky figure reach forward again for the speed-lever. The car was almost at a stop.

"Come, be ready!" he whispered, and as the Prince shifted the gears with much grinding of cogs and curses at the transmission, Deane threw open the door and slipped to the ground. The Countess was about to follow when, suddenly, the Prince turned and looked directly at him.

"Look also at the tires on the other side," he growled. Deane, grasping the situation, fell behind the car for a moment, then sprang back upon the running-board.

"*Bon, Monsieur!*" he panted.

The Prince paid no attention to him, but continued cursing the motor. The car was moving ahead at the speed of a rapid walk. Deane was afraid each moment that the motor would stop. He thrust his head inside the car.

"Come!" he whispered.

"We are going too fast," said the Countess.

"No, we're not. Come!"

The Countess slipped out and into the arms which Deane reached toward her. The manœuvre was well timed for their escape, if not for their comfort, as at the same moment the Prince shifted to the next speed ahead. The Countess was flung into the arms of the artist with such violence as to throw him on his back in the road.

The Countess scrambled to her feet. She gazed for a moment after the rapidly dwindling red light of the car, then looked down at Deane and laughed.

"*Me voilà!* I am rescued!" she cried mockingly. "You are not hurt?"

"Only in my pride," said the artist,

scrambling up. "I did not mean to conduct your rescue in precisely that way."

"At least," said the Countess, "it appears to be effective. Now, if you please, my cousin and the motor-car, for I am bare-footed, very, very hungry, and"—she yawned—"it is long past my bedtime."

"Good gracious! do you mean to say that you are standing there on your bare feet!" cried the horrified artist. "Let me carry you up to the top of the bank, and we will wait there for our car."

"Thank you," replied the Countess, "but I have been carried enough for one day. I fought horribly when Ivan caught me, but all that I accomplished by it was to scratch my forehead on his scarfpin. He has the strength of a bear, that man!"

Ignoring the protests of the young man, the Countess picked her way daintily across the road. Once or twice when a pebble came beneath her foot she gave a little *"aie!"* the cry of French children when hurt. But on reaching the bank, which was rough and bushy, she paused and looked despairingly at the artist.

"Can't we sit here and wait?" she asked.

"It would not be safe," said Deane. "The Prince is apt to miss us and return at any moment. You must let me carry you up to the trunk of that big tree. You cannot walk, because it is a chestnut and the ground will be covered with burs."

"I will do nothing of the sort," replied the Countess angrily, the unshod condition of her small foot alone preventing her from stamping it viciously. "I have been mauled and hauled about enough! If it is a question of being carried I will stop where I am!"

Deane slipped off his ulster and spread it upon the ground.

"Sit down, please," said he, "and we will see if we can't rig you up some sort of *pantoufles*. Take these big gauntlets of mine and our mufflers."

"That is a good plan," said the Countess. "You are really quite an intelligent person, after all!"

Declining the young man's assistance, the girl quickly improvised a pair of moccasins; then, taking Deane's hand, the two scrambled

up the bank and seated themselves with their backs against the big chestnut. A fringe of bushes screened them from the road and behind them there appeared to be a forest. From below them in the wooded darkness there came the noise of running water.

"Have you anything to eat and drink in your car?" asked the Countess. "I am dying of hunger and thirst."

"Poor lady," said Deane; "did he starve you also?" He reached into his pocket and pulled out the sandwiches and chicken prepared by Corentine, and which in the excitement of the chase he had quite forgotten.

"Here is some lunch which I brought for you, and while you are examining it I will go to that spring I hear and get you some water."

The Countess accepted the sandwiches with the grateful philosophy of a trained campaigner, and the artist departed in quest of water.

After a somewhat precarious journey to the bottom of a glen, dark as a pocket and sown with mossy rocks and the toughest of briers, he returned with the cover of his

flask and the inverted top of his leathern cap filled with water.

"That in the flask-cover is to drink," he explained, "and the other is for the bath. If you will let me wash your face I think that it may save your Cousin Sam a shock!"

The Countess dropped the cup which she had just emptied, and stared at him in angry bewilderment.

"Wash my face! What do you mean? *Wash my face!*"

"Yes," said Deane. "It's smeared with blood from the scratch on your forehead——"

"Oh, is it? What a fright I must be! I'm glad it's dark." The Countess quickly erased the stains of the fray, then leaned back against the tree and yawned.

"I am almost asleep," she said. "What do you suppose has delayed your car? Perhaps Cousin Sam has got discouraged and gone back to bed!" She smothered with difficulty another yawn. "I wonder what makes me so sleepy."

"You have been through enough to make you a bit jaded," said Deane dryly. "The

wonder is that you haven't nervous prostration, and heart disease, and pneumonia, and croup, and——"

"Oh, nonsense! I'm not made of *meringue!* I think that it is the speed of the car which makes it so—hard—to keep awake——"

The sleepy words seemed more and more difficult. Deane glanced at her and saw that the pretty head with its great, ruffled mane of hair was nodding farther and farther. Suddenly the Countess pitched forward, then recovered herself with an effort.

"What——?" she asked drowsily. "If you don't mind I think—that I will—will——" and again the head bobbed forward.

Deane arose quietly and threw his heavy ulster over her, then seating himself with his back propped against the tree, he drew the Countess gently down until she was resting with her head above his knee. The change of position roused her, but not to wakefulness.

"What——?" she murmured. "Yes, thank you—warm enough——" And with

a gentle sigh the Countess Diane lapsed into a deep and restful oblivion.

Deane turned up his coat-collar, shoved his hands deep into the side pockets of his jacket, and settled down to wait. He did not dare to doze for fear that Mr. Smalley, flying on his trail, might slip past before he could hail him.

The night grew old, the silence deepened, if this were possible, and remained unbroken by the distant beat of machinery for which the soul of the artist so yearned. Yet he was not unhappy. He was chilled, to be sure, for although midsummer the air was keen, and he was very hungry, for the Countess had thoughtlessly eaten his supper, light at the best. Also the Countess was snugly wrapped in his ulster, had been given the remaining swallow of brandy left in his flask, and was wearing his buckskin gauntlets upon her dainty feet. In spite of all this, or, more truthfully, because of it, the spirits of the artist never drooped, his sole concern being the non-appearance of Mr. Smalley and the motor-car.

The Countess never stirred. Her soft,

long respirations told of a deep and refreshing sleep. Possibly, the artist dozed unconsciously, as it did not seem long to him before the first mysterious light of the early summer dawn began to etch out the perspectives. Then sound seemed born again; cocks crowed in the distance, he heard the lowing of cattle, the peevish, early-morning barking of a dog, and sleepy twitterings and chirpings arose in the foliage overhead. Soon peasant carts began to pass, heading toward Lamballe, and Deane remembered that it was a market day. Lighter it grew; the chirpings in the forest ripened into song. Three- and four-horse tandems passed down the road in a long procession; peasants trudged along afoot, some shoving *voitures à bras*. It seemed to the artist, now thoroughly congealed, that the sun would never rise. The pretty head of the Countess as seen in the fresh, early light was ravishing as ever, but its weight had now assumed ponderosity, and Deane was sure that his left side was paralyzed from the waist down.

Then suddenly the sun burst up over the treetops, almost with an anthem in the glory

of a perfect morning. Deane felt his heart expand. He looked long and earnestly at the Countess, whose sleep was obviously lighter. Her cheek was resting on her hand; the rich hair, ruddy in the golden light, had broken from its last restraint and tumbled over her neck and shoulders. There was a faint flush upon her cheek, and the long lashes, several tones darker than her hair, swept down in a perfect arc. The short and slightly *retroussé* nose and pouting lips wore the expression seen on the face of a sleeping child, innocent, untroubled, confident.

Up came the sun, high over the treetops, and gazed warmly into the Countess' face. Deane laughed to see the way in which she wrinkled up her pretty nose as if to sneeze. Then she did sneeze, and promptly awoke. Up went the long lashes, the vivid blue eyes looked straight into his with a curious expression of sleepy indifference. Then, as he watched, charmed and interested at the awakening, full consciousness blazed up in their depths, and the Countess thrust herself quickly upward with her strong young arms.

"*Mon Dieu*! Where am I?" she cried.

Deane looked at her smilingly, but did not reply. The different stages of her returning consciousness from deep sleep were too pretty to interrupt.

She stared up into his face, and as she did so a great wave of color flooded her own. Her eyes fell; then she glanced up at him shyly and began to laugh. Deane joined, and for a minute or two they gave themselves up to mirth.

"*Ciel!*" cried the Countess. "What a situation!" She clasped her hands in a horror which was part real, part mockery. "Where is the motor-car—and my Cousin Sam?"

"That is what I have been asking myself all night, Countess," answered Deane. "He has either got *en panne* or 'left the road.' Sam would never quit the trail as long as a wheel would turn!"

"I hope Cousin Sam is not hurt," said the Countess demurely. "But what are we to do?"

"We must certainly get to Dinan to-day," said Deane. "It must be fifty kilometres from here, which is too far to drive, but we

are quite near Lamballe, and I happen to know that there is a train which leaves there for Dinan at about five in the afternoon, as I passed through en route from St. Brieuc not long ago."

"But I can't travel this way!" cried the Countess. "I have not even a hair-ribbon!"

Mr. Deane reached his hand in his pocket and produced the black velvet bow which he had picked up on the beach the day before.

"Permit me to supply you with one," said he with a smile.

"It is my own!" cried the Countess. "Where did you find it?"

"On the beach. It is a long story, and just now present history is far more important. It has occurred to me that if you are to escape recapture a disguise will be necessary. The Prince could not have gone far before discovering your escape, and he will rake this part of the country with a fine-toothed comb. How would you like to be a peasant girl for a few hours?"

"I would be anything for a few hours rather than be caught!" replied the Count-

ess. "I think that a peasant's costume might be rather chic. All that I have on beneath this ulster is a tattered old gown made for garden fêtes!"

"The Prince," said Deane, "thinks, no doubt, that you have bribed his chauffeur to help you to escape. He has no reason to suspect me, so his spies will be looking for you and the man. Now, if I could get you a peasant costume it would be a very effective disguise, as we would pass for an artist and his—eh—model."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Countess shortly.

"If I can get the costume," continued Deane, "I would stop one of these peasant women and engage her services as a maid. She would show you how to wear the thing."

As they were discussing the question there came toiling up the road one of the big pedlers' wagons so often met with in the provinces. Deane descended and explained to the pedler that he was an artist and had need of a complete peasant costume for his model. This the man was able to supply, and the artist also purchased some shoes and stockings, carrying up an assortment

from which the Countess made her selection. Last of all he requisitioned from the merchant's private store some bread and cheese, eggs, coffee, and a piece of sausage.

"First of all," said the young man, as he returned to the Countess, "we will go down to the brook and cook our breakfast. After that I will engage the services of a maid, when you can retire to the sylvan depths and change your costume while I am taking a nap."

He kindled a tiny fire on the edge of the brook and set some water to boil in one of the little tin pails which he had bought for the purpose. The Countess watched his preparations with the deepest interest.

"Being kidnaped is very stimulating to the appetite," she sighed, as she curled up upon the moss and waited for the water to boil. "You have no idea how good those things tasted last night."

She stopped suddenly and glanced at the artist with a startled look. "Did you have anything to eat? Was that your supper?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, yes—lots——" began the young

man. The Countess looked at him searchingly.

"I do not believe you!" said she slowly, a troubled look in her sapphire eyes. "You have an awfully 'gone' look! Tell me, on your word of honor, did you have anything to eat last night?"

"Eh—now that you mention it," began Deane apologetically, "I believe I did overlook it. You see, motoring fast always has a very peculiar effect upon me. Quite takes away my appetite—thought of food becomes absolutely repulsively——"

"I am a beast!" interrupted the Countess. She arose to her feet, and walking to where the artist was coaxing the fire with tiny twigs, stood looking down at him intently.

"I wish to know something more," said she.

"What?" said Deane, breaking a fagot upon his knee.

"Look at me, please!"

The artist looked up defiantly. The blue eyes of the Countess were fixed upon him with a singular intentness of expression,

which for some reason set the young man's heart to beating wildly.

"Did you get any sleep last night?" asked the girl.

"Sleep? Oh, my, yes—plenty——"

"I do not believe you! You were in precisely the same position when I awakened—and I had your ulster over me—and your lips were blue. You would not have dared to go to sleep for fear the car might pass. What makes those dark circles under your eyes? I am a beast!"

"No, you're not; you are a dead game sport!"

"A what?"

"A brave young person with the disposition of an angel! Most women would be calling me fighting-names for luring them into a mess like this! Stop calling yourself a beast, and clear off that flat stone for a breakfast-table!"

The Countess did not stir. "How did you happen to rescue me?" she asked. "You took your life in your hands, getting into that car! What made you want to do it?"

"Go over there and sit down, and I will tell you while the eggs are b'ilin'; you make me nervous. I'm afraid you may get on fire."

The Countess gave him another look, then slowly obeyed. In a few brief words Mr. Deane related the whole series of events.

"It is very wonderful!" she murmured, when he had finished. "But I don't understand now what made you so determined to rescue me."

"My friends would call it my meddlesome nature."

"Was it that?" The Countess' deep blue eyes regarded him curiously.

"Partly."

"What else?"

"Call it chivalry, if you like," said Deane mockingly. "There is still a little left. Here —have an egg?"

The Countess took the egg from his hand, and as she did so their eyes met, not casually, but in a deep look which brought with it a quick flame of color in the face of each. A sudden shyness fell upon the girl, and she ate her breakfast almost in silence. As for

the artist, his social obligations as host confined themselves principally to the preparation of eggs, sausage, and coffee.

When they had quite finished Deane, leaning back against a tree, surveyed the Countess with mingled admiration and amusement.

"You are at home in Arcady," he observed.

"I am at home in most places. You see, I have lived a little bit of everywhere."

"Would you mind telling me," said Deane, "why the Prince is so determined to drag you off to Russia?"

"So that he can marry me," replied the Countess with unconcern. "It would not be so easy to marry me against my will here in France."

"But if he is your legal guardian why was it necessary for him to haul you off by the hair of your head, half-dressed, and with nothing to eat or drink?"

"No doubt it seemed to him easier. My feelings did not matter."

Deane regarded her thoughtfully, then rose to his feet.

"If you will wait here," said he, "I will go and catch you a nice, motherly maid, who will help you to fool this animal!"

He walked across to the road and there waited until there came along a well-appearing woman, carrying a basket of eggs. Having explained to her the nature of the services required, she readily consented and followed the artist to where the Countess was waiting.

"Here is your maid," said Deane. "While you are undergoing your transformation I shall catch a few winks. If I am asleep when you return, wake me, please."

He flung himself upon the moss, but the Countess interfered.

"You must not lie there," said she, "you will catch cold." With a quick movement she slipped off the ulster which she had been wearing, and stood before him in the long, pale, azure Empire gown.

"Lie on this coat," said she, spreading it upon the ground.

The artist obeyed. The Countess then covered him carefully with the other ulster, and stepping back surveyed him with a

smile. Deane had never conceived so ravishing a picture as was made by the girl who stood smiling against the background of plushy green. The quaint old gown, with its open neck, and sleeves which stopped between the shoulder and elbow, contrasted charmingly in its cool, pale tints with the warm, ruddy coloring of the girl's rich hair and creamy skin, and to the fascinated eyes of the artist she seemed like a dryad just freed from one of the neighboring tree-trunks.

"Go to sleep!" said she, and raised one finger to her lips. Deane pretended to close his eyes, when the Countess, followed by the smiling peasant woman, turned and glided off into the woods.

When the artist awoke the sun was far past the meridian. He sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"I was just about to waken you," said a fresh voice at his elbow, "but you said that the train did not leave until late in the afternoon, and you seemed to be enjoying yourself *so* much!"

He turned to see the Countess *en pay-*

sanne sitting upon the mossy bank, regarding him anxiously.

"How do I look?" she asked.

"You look charming," said he. "How do you feel?"

"Horridly. Like a mummy. This bodice is at least half an inch thick and the same shape all of the way down. Haven't these women any waists?"

"No," said Deane.

"I positively draw the line at sabots. Must I have *all* of my hair under this nasty little hood?"

"It is exceedingly bad form for a peasant girl to permit a single lock of hair to show," said Deane, "but as you are posing as a model I think that you might stretch a point by loosening the coiffe enough to be cool. It must be very uncomfortable the way it is; you look as if your hair was pulled back so tightly that you could not shut your eyes!" He laughed.

The Countess stared at him with open mouth and eyes, looking curiously like an overgrown peasant child; then an angry color flared into her pretty face.

"I will not be laughed at like that! What right had you to interfere, I want to know? Do you call it rescuing a girl to pitch her out of a motor-car headfirst on a dark night and then make her masquerade about looking like a bolster?" The Countess was rapidly working herself into a fury. "I will not wear these ridiculous things——!" she cried. "I will not be made a fool of—for you to laugh at! I—I——"

"Stop it!" said Deane sternly. "Stop it at once! You have no right to talk like that!" He sprang to his feet and stood in front of the enraged Countess and shook his finger in her face, his own so stern that the girl's blue eyes opened wide. "Did you not choose to be rescued? And now you are kicking up all of this fuss purely through foolish, offended vanity! I am ashamed of you! My own regret is that you look as pretty as you do! I chose this costume," continued the wily painter, "especially in the hope that it might conceal, or at least minimize, your very unusual beaut—eh—attractiveness, and so make you less conspicuous! One would think that you were dress-

ing for a diplomatic ball instead of to escape from a brute who handled you as if you were a runaway pup! I am surprised. What"—he lowered his voice to a tone of sternest reproach—"What do you think that your Cousin Sam would say?"

"I—I——" She raised her eyes in frightened defiance. "I don't care what my Cousin Sam or any——"

"Hush!" said Deane harshly. "You don't realize what you are saying! If you knew how your Uncle Sam—I mean your Cousin Sam—and I had risked our necks, driving a fast car on a pitch-dark night at 150 kilometres an hour—for shame!"

The Countess dropped her eyes again.

"I—I'm sorry," she whispered. "Do—do you really think that I am—pretty——"

"You are far too pretty for your safety, my dear child!" said Deane paternally. "Now let's go, for it's getting late."

They walked across to the road and there, when they had gone but a short distance toward Lamballe, they were overtaken by a peasant driving a two-wheeled cart, which Deane promptly chartered to transport them

for the rest of the way. Proceeding at once to the railroad station, the artist was pleased to discover that their train was due to leave in a little over an hour. As the sight of a handsome young man in stylish motoring costume wandering about with a conspicuously pretty peasant girl promised to excite attention of an undesired character, Deane decided that the best place in which to wait would be the station itself. As the ticket-office had not yet opened and the waiting-room was empty, he secured some fruit and sandwiches, which he and the Countess were contentedly discussing when there came from just outside the window the roar of an automobile.

Moved by a common impulse, the Countess and Deane leaped to their feet and, with their heads thrust together, peered through the grimy glass. A big limousine car was swinging up to the platform, the single occupant, who was driving, having come apparently to learn something in regard to the trains, for he swung heavily to the platform without stopping the motor.

The Countess seized the muscular arm of

the artist in a grip which, strong as it was, the young man scarcely felt, for there, not three feet from them, with his great hand on the knob of the door, and his wicked, bearded face set in a savage scowl, stood Prince Ivan Kharkof himself!

III

THE Prince threw the door violently open and entered. As he did so Deane seized the Countess by both shoulders and spun her about so that her back was turned to the Prince and her face toward the window. Frightened though she was, the girl's quick resentment was roused by this violence. With an impatient gesture she flung the artist's hands from her shoulders, so that as Prince Kharkof entered the tableau presented to his eyes was that of a pretty peasant girl coquettishly freeing herself from the importunate arms of a gay young knight of the automobile.

He glanced at the pair and grunted. His wicked eyes rested for a moment on the graceful figure of the girl, which even the shapeless costume could not entirely conceal.

"Pouf!" said he, and walking to the ticket-booth he rapped sharply on the closed shutter and swore. Then he turned and looked at Deane.

"Can you tell me, Monsieur, when the next train leaves for San Malo?" he asked gruffly.

"At a quarter to six, Monsieur," answered Deane, eying him warily.

The Prince raised his heavy eyebrows, then looked sharply at the young man. During their interview of the previous night Deane had worn his winter lunettes, the flaps of which concealed his features, but he saw at once that the Russian recognized his voice.

"*Tiens!*" said he. "Are you not the gentleman who kindly assisted me last night with the loan of a pump?"

Deane bowed. "I had that honor," said he. "I trust that you had no further difficulty. We were less fortunate, as our motor began to act badly immediately you had proceeded."

"That is too bad," growled the Prince. "Accidents are often contagious." His swarthy face darkened, then his small twinkling eyes shifted to the Countess, whose back was still turned to him.

"These women!" he said, as if to himself,

then muttering something in Russian which Deane could not understand, he touched his hat in a perfunctory way and plunged out through the door. Fearing that he might catch a glimpse of the Countess' face through the window, Deane snatched the girl away with more force than ceremony.

The Countess turned upon him furiously. "How *dare* you drag me around like that!" she demanded with a vicious stamp of her foot.

Deane did not reply. He was intently watching the Prince, who climbed into his car, threw in the clutch and, trundling slowly across the square, disappeared through the arch of what appeared to be the garage of a hotel.

"Answer me!" cried the Countess passionately.

"What?" said Deane, his eyes still following the disappearing car.

"I wish you to understand," said the Countess, "that Prince or no Prince, I will not submit to being pushed and pulled about——"

"Nonsense!" said Deane sharply. "If

he had seen your face, do you know what would have happened? He would have grabbed you up as a lion takes a cub, thrown you into that car, and there would have been an end to your freedom—and all of this trouble for nothing!"

"What would you have done if he had?" asked the Countess, looking at him aslant.

"What your Cousin Sam did yesterday—hit him on the jaw. But I'm afraid that it would not have been equally effective. *I* never took boxing lessons with a prize-fighter."

The Countess surveyed him critically. "Do you know," said she, "I would rather like to see you fight?"

"Little savage! Perhaps you may before this business is finished, though I sincerely hope not."

"I wonder if you could," said the Countess thoughtfully. Her blue eyes examined the well-groomed, faultlessly-dressed figure, and she laughed with a shade of irony.

"I should like to see you rumpled up!" said she. "You look now as if you had just come from a reception, instead of having

driven a car half the night and sat with your back against a tree for the other half. I suppose"—her red lip curled scornfully—"that you are a very great ladies' man!"

"I try to be agreeable," said Deane.

"And it is only when you get some poor girl who is alone and unprotected and hounded"—the Countess' voice quavered—"that you become rough and—cross—and—brutal——"

"When a good many men," interrupted Deane, "would be gentle and affectionate and, perhaps, even demonstrative. Which do you think that you would prefer under your peculiar circumstances?"

The Countess dropped her eyes and turned half from him.

"You—you always make me act like a fool! At least you make me look—I mean, feel—I mean—— Oh, you are so superior, and sure, and—and——" The Countess turned her back upon him and looked out of the window.

Deane studied her in some perplexity. He reflected that the high spirit of the girl had probably been suffering all day from the

consciousness of her utter dependence upon him, a stranger. It occurred to him also that her pride had no doubt been stung by the humiliation of her peasant-girl disguise. The fragmentary remarks and sly glances with which the people whom they had passed had been pleased to favor them were none of them lost upon the Countess. Then the brusqueness of his own treatment of her when Kharkof appeared upon the scene had no doubt strained her slight remaining patience almost to its limits.

Thinking that, perhaps, a little solitary reflection might do her no harm in her present temper, and also because he wished to learn more of Kharkof's plans, he decided to leave her for a short time.

"I am afraid, Countess," said he, "that you are getting a bit bored with me. Do you mind if I leave you for a few minutes? I want to find out, if I can, what the Prince is up to."

The Countess did not reply.

"I will be back immediately," said Deane. "Please wait here."

He left the waiting-room and, crossing the

square, entered the hotel. Passing through to the café, he saw the car in the court and the Prince standing beside it talking to a man who appeared to be the chef de garage. Their conversation reached the artist quite plainly through the open windows.

"Replenish the essence and lubricating oil," said the Prince, "and clean the carbureter. That is all. Do not touch the motor."

"*Bon, M'sieu'.*"

"I am going to San Malo on the next train and will return for the car to-morrow or the day after, but it is possible that I may send some one for the car at any hour. See to it that there is no delay."

"*Oui, M'sieu'.*"

"*Bon.* Here are two louis for you. Take care that you do not go off and leave the garage locked up!"

"*Merci, merci, M'sieu'.* It shall be as you command."

The Prince started to leave the yard, when he caught sight of Deane. He turned to the chef de garage.

"*Dites donc!* The valves of my pump are no good. Get a new one and leave it

in the car." He glanced at Deane. "That was very good of you last night. We were in a bad place to get a *panne* and at a bad time of the night. It was cursedly annoying." His face grew savage and he turned upon his heel and entered the café.

Deane returned to the Countess, whom he found in a condition of ill-restrained excitement. Her pique was quite forgotten in the interest of a fresh discovery.

"There is a spy watching the railroad station!" she whispered breathlessly. "He has been loitering about the platform, and when the ticket-seller arrived I overheard him questioning him about the people to whom he had sold tickets this morning."

"Where is he now?"

"I think that he is on the front platform —*sh-h-h!*"

The door upon the other side of the room opened softly and there entered a tall, sallow man who, from his dress and general appearance, suggested the provincial advocate. Passengers for the train were beginning to arrive, and at these he glanced quickly and keenly. His eyes lingered for an instant

upon the artist and his companion, then, with an indifferent glance at the Countess, he turned and went out again.

"You are right," said Deane. "That fellow is a spy—but I do not think that he suspects anything."

"What did you learn?" asked the Countess.

"The Prince is going to San Malo by our train. What his plans are beyond that I do not know. Very possible he thinks that you may get aboard the train at some way-station along the route. As the case stands, I am afraid that prudence will compel us to get to Dinan in some other way. The danger of his recognizing you is too great."

"But what other way is there?" asked the Countess.

"I have been turning the situation in my mind," said the artist calmly, "and I have about decided to borrow the Prince's car."

The Countess stared, then her pretty face grew red with anger.

"Your little joke does not amuse me," said she coldly.

"Why will you persist in doing me in-

justice?" asked Deane. "I am quite in earnest. The Prince has left the car in the garage across the street, and I am quite sure that I will have no difficulty in obtaining the use of it for two or three hours. I can take you to Dinan and get back before he arrives at San Malo!"

The blue eyes of the Countess opened very wide; she surveyed the young man with an admiration which was not unmixed with awe.

"For simple, unembarrassed impudence," said she, "you are quite a revelation to all European principles. But why don't you ask him to have his lamp repaired before you borrow his car?"

"It would take too long, and we simply must get to Dinan this evening. However, I will insist upon his supplying us with a new pump. It would be very annoying to have to stop upon the road."

The Countess stared at her companion, then, dropping her face into her hands, fought hard to smother her laughter; but to Deane the situation was far too precarious for mirth.

"We had better remain here until the

train goes," said he, "and make sure that the Prince goes with it. Then I will go over and see what I can do about the car."

The Countess did not reply. Instead, she let her eyes rest thoughtfully upon the clean-cut, thoroughbred features of the artist. Suddenly he glanced up, his clear, gray eyes looked into the girl's, and they both laughed. Then the color swept into the Countess' face and her eyes softened wonderfully. She turned slightly away, and, resting her elbow on the window-sill, looked out through the grimy pane.

Presently, Deane, who was studying the charming profile presented to him with a deep interest which was not purely professional, saw the color fade swiftly from the girl's cheek.

"He's coming!" she whispered. Deane glanced at his watch.

"It is almost train-time," said he.

The Prince entered, stepped to the ticket-booth and purchased a ticket, then went out upon the front platform, where he was joined by the sallow gentleman of legal appearance, to whom he appeared to be giving

the most minute instructions. They were still talking when the train clamored in. The passengers scrambled aboard, the Prince among them, the guards squawked upon their childish trumpets, the locomotive squealed, the chef de garage tooted upon his little horn, and the train rattled off again.

"Now," said Deane, "as soon as quiet is restored I will start upon my criminal undertaking."

"How do you propose to go about it?" asked the Countess.

"I shall tell the man in charge that at the last moment my friend, the Prince, with whom he saw me talking, desired me to meet him with the car at Dinan. Then this evening, when I return the car, I will tell him I must have misunderstood the Prince, that there was some mistake, and caution him that the less said about it the better."

The Countess sighed. "I am sure," said she, "that you are a young man who deserves to succeed!"

Again their eyes met and again they both laughed, but this time the blood flared up in

the face of the artist also. The Countess sighed.

"While you were in the hotel," said she, "a very nice-looking man, either an Englishman or an American, came in and studied the train schedule. He looked at me so hard that I thought he was going to speak to me. I would not have minded much if he had, because I was very lonely and he looked so very well-bred and agreeable."

"I plainly see," said Deane coldly, "that it is not safe to leave you alone."

"Not if you have been cross with me," said the Countess plaintively.

"If I am ever cross with you," replied the artist gently, "it is because I have your welfare so much at heart."

"Why?" asked the Countess demurely.

"Because I—eh—you are very—that is, you see, you are under my protection—and——"

The Countess' eyes softened. "You *are* good!" she exclaimed, impulsively holding out both hands to the young man. "Thank you!"

Deane, quite overcome, took the two small

hands in his and looked into the girl's eyes. Exactly what the situation might have developed it is impossible to say, for at that moment the door of the room was flung open and a tall young man entered hurriedly.

At sight of the tableau presented he stopped short, his eyes opened very wide and his lean, square jaw dropped with amazement.

"Upon my word!" he cried in harsh American. "So *this* is the way you spend your time after inciting me to assault and battery and burning up my money in telegrams trying to find your corpse!"

"Sam!" cried the startled Mr. Deane, still clinging to the hands of the Countess.

"Philandering as usual," continued Mr. Smalley cuttingly. "If it isn't a Countess it's a pretty peasant, and if it's neither it's some one else. Come, kiss the girl and give her ten sous and let's get out of this. I've had the d——dest night! And all on account of you, confound you! You and your Countess——"

"*Sam!* Shut up!" cried the horrified artist. "Don't you see——"

"No, I don't!" cut in Mr. Smalley irately; "and if I'd known that your *grande passion* at first sight was going to be so easily short-circuited by a pretty ankle and a pair of rosy cheeks——"

"Sam! You everlasting chump——" The agonized artist made so wild a rush at his angry friend that Mr. Smalley stepped quickly aside. The next instant Deane had grabbed him roughly by the shoulder. The Countess had risen to her feet as majestically as an ill-fitting bodice and a very short skirt would permit and was regarding the two young men with her blue eyes almost black from anger. Her face was quite pale and her lower lip was clenched in her white, even teeth.

"Can't you see?" cried the wretched Mr. Deane. "This *is* the Countess Roubanoff!"

"It *is?*" cried the startled Mr. Smalley. "Well, upon my word!"

For an instant he surveyed the angry beauty in mingled wonder and amusement. Then, with some effort, he controlled a violent inward emotion and bowed.

"Countess Roubanoff," said Deane, des-

perately, "permit me to present Mr. Smalley—eh—your—eh, Cousin Sam!"

The faintest quiver appeared upon the corners of the girl's mouth. She nodded slightly in response to the respectful bow of Mr. Smalley.

"Mr.—eh—Mr.——" She turned in some vexation to the artist. "What is *your* name, please?"

"*My* name!" cried Deane, by this time hopelessly demoralized. "Oh—eh—*my name*——" He looked helplessly at his friend. "What the deuce *is* my name, Sam—oh, Deane, of course——"

"Mr. Deane," continued the Countess, biting her lip, "tells me that we are related."

"Ah—yes," replied Mr. Smalley placidly. "My mother's—ah—great-uncle, I believe it was, was your—ah—maternal grandmother's—ah—sister, or wife, or—something."

"Oh, I see," said the Countess in a creamy voice. "*That* was why you were both so determined to rescue me."

"Of course," said Mr. Smalley gravely. "One must stand by one's relatives, you know."

The two looked at each other; then the lips of both began to twitch. Then, as if moved by the same impulse, they turned and regarded the unhappy Deane, who was looking from one to the other in a crumbled sort of way, and *his* lips began to twitch also. All three faces grew very red and, suddenly, a shout of laughter from the men and a clear, rollicking peal from the Countess burst out spontaneously, and the situation was at once relieved.

"We looked for you very eagerly last night, Cousin Sam," said the Countess, touching her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I was nearly frantic!" said Smalley. "There was no difficulty with the chauffeur, poor chap, but in my excitement I started off on third and snapped my crank-shaft like a pipe-stem. There I was—*en panne!* By and by a chap came along and took me in tow. I stopped at the first inn we struck, a villainous place on the edge of the town, and there the car is now, with Serge in charge. He has decided to quit the service of the Prince and enter mine. I shall sack that amorous Cockney!" His keen eyes

rested curiously upon the Countess. "How did you two manage?"

They quickly told the story of their adventures, at which Smalley laughed.

"I should have seen that you were not a peasant at once," he said to the Countess, "if I had not been so vexed. As it was, I simply thought that Archie was up to his old tricks—eh——"

"His old *what?*" asked the Countess quickly.

"Oh—eh—you know, Countess, artists have a way," began Mr. Smalley, avoiding the menacing eye of his friend, "of going about with one eye on the alert for a new and interesting type of—eh—face, and when they find one which interests them they are apt to engage its owner in—eh—conversation, sometimes playing upon the emotions for the sake of developing new expressions, I presume——"

"Oh, rot!" growled the infuriated Deane.

The Countess glanced at him as one might at some new and interesting reptile.

"Yes?" she said, turning expectantly to

Mr. Smalley. "How *very* interesting. And what then—Cousin Sam?"

"If we are going to get to Dinan tonight," growled Deane, "we had better start!"

"Then," said Mr. Smalley, utterly disregarding the interruption, "they take mental notes."

"What kind of notes?" asked the Countess.

"Mental notes they call them."

"But isn't that very difficult?" asked the girl. "Fancy, *mental* notes!"

"It is not difficult for most people," answered Smalley, "but Deane has often said that it was for him. That is probably why he requires so much practice."

Deane rose to his feet. "Since there is no assistance to be looked for from your Cousin Sam, Countess," he said, laying infinite sarcasm upon the word "cousin," "I will reluctantly leave you in his care while I see what can be done in regard to transportation."

"Why not borrow the Prince's car?" suggested Mr. Smalley. "It is over in the

garage—and I have a man who thoroughly understands it!" he added with a grin.

"That is precisely what I was about to do!" said Deane. "We had foolishly counted upon you, but since you have gone and smashed *your* car just at the critical moment there is nothing else to do. I must say, I don't see how you managed it! Any beginner would know better than that! A nice mess you've got your cousin in!"

The lean, hard face of Mr. Smalley grew glum. Like a good many young men of wealth and no occupation, he took the serious things of life lightly and his pastimes very seriously. Of late years the one thing upon which he had come to pride himself was his complete mastery of motor-cars. To add to his chagrin, his New England conscience told him that the rebuke was entirely deserved.

"There must have been a flaw in that——" he began.

"There was a flaw in your judgment!" said Deane bitterly. "Fancy trying to start a big car——"

"Oh, well," said Mr. Smalley vexedly, "I

acknowledge that I made a slight error in judgment——"

"A *slight* error!" echoed his friend, who was still smarting from the witticisms of the other. "Oh, puff! What do you call slight? A crank-shaft? What do you expect to run your car by, anyhow? Moral suasion, or animal magnetism, or——"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Mr. Smalley wearily. "I've gone and done it—and know it, and now I am ready to make good. What do you want me to do? Wheel my cousin to Dinan in a push-cart?"

"We have wasted time enough in flippancy," said Deane, glancing at the Countess, who was looking from one to the other of the young men with very large, round, blue eyes. "Do you remember that sharp turn in the road where it goes up that steep little grade just before you come into the town?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Smalley. "We had to get out and push there. My car is stabled just this side of that place."

"Then take the Countess with you," said Deane, "and meet me there in about half an

hour. You can stop on the way and get the Prince's chauffeur. We don't want to snap any more crank-shafts?"

"But how do you know that you can get the Prince's car——?" began Mr. Smalley.

"Oh, puff! You do your part and I will do mine. You have failed me once, and by blue, if you ever fail me again it will be the last time that I ever take the trail with you after any more kidnaped Countesses," said Mr. Deane impressively. He turned to the girl.

"I hate to turn you over to any such irresponsible person, Countess," said he; "but needs must when your Cousin Sam drives!" He turned to his friend. "Don't you leave her for a minute! for a second! Do you understand? Now let's go—we've wasted time enough already."

Nodding to his thoroughly subjugated listeners, Mr. Deane went out of the door and crossed the square to the hotel, where he seated himself at a table on the terrace.

"Send me the chef de garage," he said to the *garçon* as the latter was pocketing a very lavish tip.

KHARKOF

"Oui, M'sieu'." The waiter disappeared and returned in a few moments with the somewhat reluctant functionary, who wore an expression which seemed to say that money might pay for this concession, but that it would take considerable.

Deane glanced at him indifferently, then slowly and absently finished his drink.

"V'la, M'sieu'—c'est M'sieu' le chef de garage," said the *garçon* nervously.

"Eh bien," replied Deane impatiently. "That is all—you may go!"

The waiter vanished. Deane glanced languidly at the man in front of him.

"M'sieu' desires something?" asked the fellow ominously.

"If I had not," said Deane curtly, "do you think that I would have gone to the trouble of sending for you? *Monsieur le Prince,"* he continued irritably, "at the very last moment called to me from the train to take his cursed car to Dinan, or San Malo, or some place—I do not know!" He shook the hand holding the cigarette irritably. "Get it ready!"

The man's whole demeanor underwent a

change. He appeared to draw in at the corners like a turtle.

"But, Monsieur——"

"But what?" said Deane sharply. "Is not the car ready to start at once? Ah, yes—there was a pump or something to be bought. Never mind. Take one out of any car and say that it was stolen. This will pay for it." He tossed the man a note for fifty francs. "If there is anything left it is for you, and this"—he handed another note of the same denomination—"is for you if you bring the car around within ten minutes!"

"*Merci, M'sieu'*—the car will be here!" The man hurried off effervescing acknowledgments, leaving Mr. Deane to reflect upon the singularly direct relations between money, in the abstract and concrete, and anything belonging or appertaining to the automobile.

At the end of the allotted ten minutes Deane descended to the yard of the garage, where he found the keeper in the act of "cranking up." Being perfectly acquainted with this type of car, the artist made a successful start, and, picking his way carefully

through the narrow street, quickly arrived at the place of rendezvous. There was no one in sight, but as he drew up and horned a man whom he at once recognized as the former chauffeur of the Prince came out from behind the hedge and saluted him.

"Where is M. Smalley?" demanded Deane.

"He told me to wait here and tell you that he would come at once, Monsieur. He wished to examine something about the car."

"Imbecile!" muttered Deane, twisting his mustache nervously. Even while on his way from the hotel he had been conscious of an odd and disagreeable sense of impending ill which was by no means allayed by the absence of Mr. Smalley and the Countess.

For five minutes he sat in the car, his anxiety rapidly increasing. At last it became insupportable, and he was about to return on foot and investigate the cause of the delay when the chauffeur observed:

"Monsieur is coming now. He is running."

A thrill of horror swept through the art-

ist. He leaned out and looked back in the direction from which he had come, when, to his sickening dismay, he beheld Mr. Smalley tearing down the road. In a second he had leaped out of the car and dashed to meet him.

"Where is she?" gasped Deane. Smalley's tanned face was pale and his eyes bulging from fright and exertion.

"Where is she?" cried Deane.

"I don't know!" panted the wretched Mr. Smalley. "She's gone!"

"Gone! Gone where? Gone how? Who took her?" The voice of the artist was so savage that his friend shrunk away from him.

"Do you think that I'd be here if I knew, Archie?" cried the agonized Mr. Smalley.

"But you must know!" snarled Deane. "You didn't leave her, did you?"

Mr. Smalley stepped back, startled at the ferocity in the face of his usually tranquil friend.

"I—I *did* leave her for—for a few minutes, Archie," he wailed. "I—I wanted to see something about the car——"

The frantic artist wasted at least twenty seconds of priceless time in a frenzied objurgation of Mr. Smalley, his car, his faithlessness of character and neglect of trust, after which, telling the chauffeur to wait with the automobile, he seized his jaded friend by the shoulder and pushed him in the direction whence he had come.

"Show me where you left her!" he growled.

"She was standing in the court beside the back door of the inn," panted Mr. Smalley as they hastened along. "I was scarcely out of earshot——"

"Were you working at the car?" demanded Deane, glancing at the grimy hands of his false friend.

"A little—I might have been hammering," acknowledged Smalley, sheepishly. "But I was not gone over ten minutes——"

"Ten minutes—oh, my soul!" The artist groaned in anguish.

"And when I came back she was gone—vanished into thin air. Of course I tore around asking every one I saw——"

"The worst thing you could have done. Here we are!"

They had reached the inn, a rambling, slovenly old road-house, which looked as if it might have been a very pretentious house in the middle of the fourteenth century. The walls were very thick, with long embrasures for archers or musketeers, and doors and gates of both house and yard were grilled. In the rear was a roughly-paved court, flanked by dirty outhouses and surrounded by a massive wall.

"Dismal hole!" said Smalley; "but it looked good to us about three o'clock this morning when we reached here in tow of a cabbage-cart. The car is in that stable."

Deane looked about him narrowly. "And the Countess," said he, "is in that house!" He pointed to the inn.

"What makes you think so?—Hang it, I wish that brute would stop blowing that beastly horn."

From the kitchen of the inn there had risen the wailing, lugubrious notes of a French *cor de chasse,* a sweet and melancholy instrument when heard at a distance and

played by a skillful performer, but a veritable instrument of torture in the hands of a novice. In the present case the notes issuing from the horn suggested the trumpeting of a she-elephant deprived of her calf. To add to the harrowing result, the mournful strains had stirred the soul of every dog within its reach, and the animals were voicing their emotions from all about the place.

In the irritated condition of his nerves the tumult was maddening to Mr. Smalley. He started for the kitchen door.

"If gold cannot silence that row," said he, "force will have to!"

"Wait," said Deane sharply. "Perhaps the fellow is not making that noise entirely for fun."

"What is that?" cried Mr. Smalley, his face growing suddenly tense. "You mean that you think—that——"

"Listen—what is that?"

"What?"

"That cry—or—scream—or howl——"

Both men listened intently. The horn was clamoring, dogs howling, and from somewhere in the front of the inn came a clamor

of men's voices. Yet, woven into the riot there was an alien note which, as it reached the ears of the artist, turned his face a shade paler and produced a peculiar tingling sensation at the nape of his neck. He glanced inquiringly at his companion. Mr. Smalley's face was also a trifle paler than before.

"I heard it then," said he, moistening his lips. "It *may* be a dog, but it sounded like —like——"

"A woman!" said Deane. "Listen!"

They listened intently. The horn redoubled its clamor, the curs likewise, but the sound which had so stirred their pulses was not repeated.

"Where was the girl standing when you left her?" asked Deane.

"Just a little this side of that kitchen door."

Deane's eyes searched every detail of the inclosure. The rough cobbles with which the court was paved presented nothing for examination; the drab wall was equally inscrutable, and looking at the black, narrow windows at the rear of the inn was like peering

into so many rat-holes. All conjecture seemed to centre upon the low, back door which apparently opened into the kitchen, whence still proceeded the diabolical clamorings of the horn. Deane walked toward it slowly, observing as he did so that the casement had been newly whitewashed. As his eyes wandered searchingly to the windows above, Smalley, who was standing by his side, studying the door, gripped him fiercely by the arm.

"Look!" said he, pointing at the rough wooden casement, which was fitted clumsily into the heavy, stone aperture of the door.

Deane looked, and his heart gave a tremendous bound, for there, scarring the fresh whitewash of the woodwork, were the prints of four small fingers which had obviously been wrenched away in a vain effort to cling to the rim of the doorway.

The two men exchanged glances. The bony, angular features of Mr. Smalley were set with the grimness of a death-mask, while Deane's more mobile face was quivering with a savage impatience. His clear, gray eyes shone as green as two emeralds.

"That settles it!" said he. "Where's your cursed car?"

"My car——"

"Yes. Have you got a couple of good, heavy spanners?"

The light of comprehension blazed up in the face of Mr. Smalley.

"Oho!" said he. "That's the game. Yes —I've got just what we need. Come on!"

They quickly crossed the court, and Smalley, producing a large key, unlocked the stable door. In a grim silence the two men walked to the inert car and selected from the tool-kit the two big steel spanners. Not waiting to lock the door again, they recrossed the court, and Deane, stepping to the kitchen door, rapped sharply with the butt of his weapon.

IV

THE blatant clamoring of the horn ceased suddenly, and it seemed to the men listening outside as if the very abruptness of its stop was the signal for every dog in the neighborhood to carry on the melancholy refrain. A deep-throated roar from the kitchen of the inn led the chorus, and this was followed by a sniffing and growling within which caused Deane to tighten his grip on the spanner.

All at once the horn recommenced with greater violence and wilder variations. Deane raised his spanner and thundered on the door, as if to beat it in.

"*Ouvrez! Ouvrez là!*" he bellowed.

Again the horn ceased. There was a scuffling about inside and the muttering of several voices, followed by the clattering of sabots and the clinking of glass.

"Smash it in!" muttered Mr. Smalley. Deane was about to comply when there was the sound of a bolt shot and a rattle of the

latch. The door opened about a foot and a villainous face beneath a shock head of hair appeared in the aperture.

"*Dites donc!* Is this the way you keep your inn—locking out your patrons?" demanded Deane angrily. "Open the door."

The man, a heavy, loutish fellow, smooth-shaven, like all Breton peasants, and with the flat, Bigouden features suggestive of his strange, Mongolian ancestry, muttered some excuse and threw open the door. The dog, a big, woolly, bobtailed sheep-herder, stood at his heels growling for a moment, then made a dash for the yard, where it circled with barking howls.

Across the room two men, who appeared to be *ouvriers,* were sitting on a bench smoking, and a greasy-looking individual with a hooked nose and pointed beard, who, from his cap and apron, was evidently the chef, stirred a pot, watching the two from the corners of his eyes.

As Deane with Smalley at his elbow entered the room he glanced quickly about, taking in the strategic features of the situation. Through an open door which led to a *buvette*

in the front of the inn he caught a glimpse of several rough-looking men, apparently patrons of the place. One or two glanced furtively in his direction, but most preserved a sullen and watchful silence.

The artist stepped to this door, shut and bolted it. He turned to the man who had let them in.

"Now, my good fellow," said he, "bring out that girl, and bring her out quickly!"

"What is that you say, M'sieu'?" answered the fellow sullenly.

Deane stepped toward him, and the man, apparently not liking the expression in the eyes of the artist, backed a step and stood with his hulking shoulders against the wall.

"Watch for a kick, Archie!" said Smalley, in English.

"I am watching," said Deane. "You keep tabs on the rest of the outfit. I don't intend to lose any time over this job!"

He stepped directly in front of the innkeeper, the heavy spanner in his left hand and his right clenched.

"I say," he repeated, "that you are to bring out that peasant girl whom you have

hidden somewhere, and bring her out at once!"

"I do not know what you are talking about," growled the fellow.

"Look out for trouble, Sam!" said Deane, without taking his watchful eyes from the man. "Use your fists if you can; don't use the spanner unless you have to."

"Go ahead, my boy," replied Mr. Smalley cheerfully. "I see nothing here which will need the spanner."

"For the last time," said Deane, stepping directly in front of the muttering innkeeper, "I tell you to get the girl. Are you going to do it?"

"I do not know of what you are talking," mumbled the man.

The quick eye of the artist caught the sly shifting of the fellow's bulk to one foot, and warned him of what was coming—*la savate*—the terrible, lashing kick, which is less a kick than a swinging blow with the foot. But the man was standing too close to the wall to deliver it, and as he moved forward Deane drove the end of the spanner into the pit of his stomach. He doubled up and

dropped to the floor, for the moment *hors de combat.*

"Look out!" cried Mr. Smalley, and Deane whirled in his tracks just in time to dodge a heavy iron pot hurled at him by the cook. Before the fellow could lay hand on another missile Smalley had leaped upon him and dealt him a blow between the eyes which quite destroyed all of the fight that was left in him. Down he went across a bench, from which he slipped and rolled upon the floor, holding his face in his hands.

The two men who had been sitting upon the settle had risen to their feet, but either through fear or bewilderment had taken no part in the scrimmage.

"Do you two belong to this inn?" demanded Deane of one of them.

"No, M'sieu'. We stopped but for a pipe and a glass of eau-de-vie."

"How long have you been here?"

"We have but just arrived, M'sieu'."

"Do you know anything about a peasant girl who has been made a prisoner here?"

The two faces became wooden in their utter lack of expression.

"No, M'sieu', we do not know anything about it."

Deane stared at them for an instant, then pointed to the door.

"Go," said he, "if you do not want to be arrested! The gendarmes are coming."

The word "gendarmes" had its usual magical effect. The two men shambled quickly to the door and went out. Deane shut the door behind them and bolted it.

The cook was still sitting on the floor, nursing his face. The innkeeper had clambered to his feet again and was standing half-crouched, his palms against the wall, glaring at the artist, upon whom he was prevented from rushing only by the heavy weapon in the young man's hand.

"Now then, animal," said Deane, "will you take us to the girl, or do you want a little more from the same bottle? *Vite!*"

"I tell you that there is no girl here. I shall make you pay for this! You have come into my house by force and beaten me and——"

"Shut your mouth!" Deane planted himself squarely in front of the man.

"Sam," said he, without looking around, "shove the poker into the fire."

Smalley gasped. "What?" he cried. "The poker——"

"Yes, the poker! Heat it up!"

"But you can't torture the scoundrel, Archie——"

"Will you heat up that poker, or must I? Do you realize that the Countess is somewhere in this dive? You don't understand; the Prince has nothing to do with this. It is a different matter. This devil has the girl locked up somewhere, but he is afraid to admit it now, because it's a case of deportation or—the guillotine!"

Smalley's face blanched. Without a word he walked to the hearth and shoved the poker into the coals.

"If either of you move," said Deane in a low voice, "we will beat your head in!" He glanced at the cook, whose beady eyes were glittering as if he were planning some mischief. "Throw that cook out, Sam," he continued. "We don't need him, and he looks as if he were going to make a break of some sort."

"But suppose he gives the alarm?"

"No danger! All *he* wants is to get away. Besides, hot iron will open this dog's lips quicker if he is alone!"

"But you don't really mean to use that poker——"

Deane's face set grimly. "I mean to have the Countess out of here, and that mighty quick! My Heavens, man!" he cried frenziedly, "it may be too late now. Hurry; chuck out that cursed cook!"

Smalley stepped to the door and threw it open. There was nobody in sight.

"*Allez!*" he said to the cook. The man stared, then scrambled to his feet and scurried out.

"See if there is anybody in the *buvette*," said Deane. His friend unbolted the door and looked into the room. It was empty.

"You see?" said Deane. "They know that there has been some funny business, and they have all cleared out. I will bet that there is not a soul in the house. Did you notice that there were no women about the place? That always looks significant. Give me the poker!"

Smalley stepped to the hearth and drew the poker from where he had laid it among the coals. As he did so the innkeeper spoke.

"I will take you to the girl, M'sieu', if you will let me go free," he whined; "if you will not give me to the gendarmes."

"I will promise nothing," said Deane, "but you will take me to the girl, or you will never leave this room alive!" He reached for the poker.

"*Tiens!*" snarled the man, shrinking back. "I will take you to the girl."

"Where is she?"

"In the cellar. If M'sieu' will light the lamp——"

Smalley took a lamp from the table and lighted it.

"Give me the lamp," said Deane, "and you walk close behind this brute, and if he makes a shifty move smash him. Look out for tricks!" He turned to the innkeeper. "Go on! Lead the way!"

The man walked unsteadily through the *buvette,* then, opening a door, led them down a long, dark passageway. Half-way to the

other end a flight of low, stone steps descended between two walls of rough masonry and at the bottom stopped before a damp, fungus-covered door which was apparently as old as the building itself.

Led by the innkeeper, they descended the steps. Deane observed, without remarking its significance, that the door was not bolted, but simply on the latch. The innkeeper threw it open and they looked into a black void which reeked of mould and the pungent odor of sour wine.

"Listen!" whispered Smalley.

From somewhere in the solid darkness there came a faint sound of sobbing, apparently from behind thick walls.

"Countess!" called Deane. "Countess—where are you?"

There was an instant of silence, then a muffled voice came in answer.

"Here—here—oh, I *knew* that you would come!" The sobbing broke out afresh, but this time with a different note.

"Go on!" cried Deane harshly. "Countess," he cried, "are you hurt?"

"No—no, only very frightened!"

"Hurry!" said Deane to the innkeeper, who was stumbling on ahead.

The man led the way through a sort of winding lane between casks and barrels and what appeared to be bins containing odds and ends of ancient rubbish. By the dim light of the lantern it seemed as if the refuse accumulated in the cellar dated back as far as the building above it, and in one corner Deane caught a glimpse of an old Sedan-chair with its musty trappings still attached. Suddenly their guide said something in patois.

"Keep quiet!" said Smalley, who was directly behind the man. "There is somebody over behind those casks, Archie," he added in English. "Look out for a rush."

"If that fellow makes the slightest move," said Deane savagely, "let him have it with the spanner. We can't afford to take any chances now!" He raised his voice: "We are coming, Countess!"

Presently the innkeeper paused in front of a heavy door fastened by a horizontal bar in big iron staples. Deane had stepped forward and was holding the lamp above his

head, reaching with the other hand for the bar, when some object came flying from out the darkness, struck the lamp from his hand and knocked it into a heap of rubbish. It flared up brilliantly and in the blaze Deane saw two figures clambering toward him over some small casks. He gripped his weapon and braced himself for the assault, but at that moment Smalley was flung violently against him, knocking him backward so that he tripped upon something under foot and fell, the spanner flying from his hand. The flame from the lamp suddenly expired and the whole place was plunged in utter blackness.

Deane struggled to his feet. "Where are you, Sam?"

"H-h-ere!" gasped a panting breath. "S-s-trike a light!"

There was the sound of a scuffle, then the clean impact of heavy blows, followed by a smothered cry of pain. At his elbow Deane heard someone groping and stumbling, and muttering in patois. He stepped back warily, then pulled out his match-box and was about to strike a light when a flame shot up close at

hand, followed by a vivid blaze. The shattered lamp had ignited some inflammable rubbish, which flared up fiercely.

The first thing to meet Deane's eyes, blinded by the light, was the face of his friend, who was lying across the body of the innkeeper; the second was a burly fellow who rushed at him head down. Deane sprang aside and struck out with his fist. The man went down, and the artist, without waiting to see what was coming next, leaped to the door behind which the Countess was imprisoned and threw out the bar. As he did so something came flying from the darkness and crashed against his forehead. The shock staggered him, but he was able to recover himself enough to fling open the door.

By this time one corner of the cellar was a mass of seething flame, and the foul air was filled with pungent fumes. Deane wiped his eyes, which were obscured by some smarting substance, and, catching a glimpse of the Countess standing in the brilliant light, drew her toward him. Smalley scrambled to his feet. The only other person appeared to be the innkeeper, who, even as Deane

glanced at him, climbed upon his legs and rushed for the steps.

"Come!" panted Smalley. "The place is on fire!"

A fit of coughing seized Deane. Unable to speak, he gripped the Countess by the wrist and staggered toward the steps. Smalley, pausing to pick up the spanner which he had dropped when he clinched with the innkeeper, followed him. The light was now obscured by the smoke, but there was enough to enable them to grope their way, half-smothered, to the door. Deane threw his shoulder against it.

"Locked—bolted!" he gasped.

"Look out!" cried Smalley, thrusting him aside. With two heavy blows of the big spanner he burst out the rotten panel, and shoving his hand through, slid the bolt. The next instant they were groping their way up the stone steps. Not a soul was in sight as they slipped out of the front door of the inn and into the road. It was twilight and a fog seemed to be driving in. Deane's head was swimming and he was conscious of a smarting pain across the forehead, but he stag-

gered on, clinging to the wrist of the Countess. Smalley glanced at him sharply.

"Put on your lunettes!" said he; "your face is all bloody!"

Deane obeyed mechanically. He was dimly conscious that the Countess had made some exclamation and that she was holding him by one arm while Smalley half-led, half-dragged him by the other. Suddenly the automobile loomed up gigantic and grotesque in front of him, and to the artist it seemed to be swaying like a vessel in a heavy sea.

"Start the motor!" came Smalley's voice in French and from a long distance away. Instinctively Deane tried to stagger to the front of the car, but some pressure from behind seemed urging him into a dark opening before him. He lurched forward heavily, heard a grinding, tearing sound, and then it seemed to him that the earth had torn from its axis and the entire planet was whirling madly through space. With an infinite effort he recovered his sense of the actuality of things, and as he did so discovered that he was propped in one corner of the limousine, his head resting upon the shoulder of the

Countess, while her arm was about his neck. For some bizarre reason his first appreciation of this position was one of amusement. He chuckled.

"You got that fight that you were wishing for!" he mumbled, then slid gently into utter oblivion.

. . . . .

Deane thought that he was driving a big, new-model, six-cylinder comet of 150 chevaux, and was doing his little best to dodge the other comets and pass without fouling the small, two-cylinder stars and motor-cycle meteorites which he overtook on his record-smashing run from Polaris to the Southern Cross, via *La Voie Lactée.* But the track was greasy and the other comets showed no sense of traffic regulations, and, to make matters more confusing, Sam Smalley kept repeating monotonously: "How are you feeling now, old boy? How are you feeling now——" until Deane became thoroughly irritated.

"Oh, shut up!" he snapped, then opened his eyes and looked about him in bewilderment.

He was lying upon a rug at the side of the road. The stars were out and twinkling brightly overhead—and something disagreeably tight was encircling his head.

"Where is the Countess?" were his first words. Mr. Smalley laughed.

"Not such a great way off," said he dryly.

"I am here," said a soft voice, and the artist discovered, with a quickening of the heart-action which went far to restore him, that his head was resting in the lap of the girl herself, while one of her hands was clasping his own.

"Oh," said he contentedly. "That's so. We got you."

"Yes," said the soft voice, "you have got me."

"What happened?" asked the artist, struggling to sit up.

"Things," replied Mr. Smalley laconically.

"Don't try to get up just yet!" murmured the Countess.

"What is the matter?" asked Deane, much ashamed of his weakness. "Did I faint, or something?"

"You did both," said Mr. Smalley. "The loss of a liter or so of blood will sometimes make one faint. But it will do you no harm. You were always a hot-headed young man."

"For shame!" cried the Countess indignantly. "He is nothing of the sort—and besides, I should like to know where I would be now if he were not!"

The artist struggled again to assume a less helpless position, and was this time successful.

"How do you feel?" asked the Countess anxiously.

"Oh, I feel all right, thanks," answered Deane untruthfully. "Just a little giddy and horribly thirsty. What are you looking at, Sam?"

"I am looking for a blaze," said Mr. Smalley, "and very much disappointed that I do not see it. There has been plenty of time."

"You ought to be glad," observed the artist, "unless you are tired of your car."

"By George, I had forgotten all about the car!" cried Mr. Smalley. "You don't

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see any sign of a fire over there, do you?" he inquired anxiously.

"Never mind the fire, Cousin Sam," said the Countess. "Go and get Mr. Deane a drink of water."

Mr. Smalley filled a cup from a spring by the roadside and, with his eyes turned fearfully in the direction of the town, handed it to the Countess, who held it to the lips of the artist.

When he had emptied the cup four times, Mr. Deane expressed his desire to go on.

"Are you sure that you feel strong enough?" asked the Countess.

"Perhaps, if he were to sit in front, the breeze might revive him," suggested Mr. Smalley. "I do not mind sitting inside with my cousin, Archie," he added with a grin.

"That is absurd!" said the Countess sharply. "Suppose that he were to faint again? He might pitch out into the road!"

"That is true," assented Mr. Smalley. "Then we would have to stop again and pick

him up. Besides, I fancy that he will be more comfortable inside."

The Countess' eyes flashed in the darkness, but she did not answer.

Assisted by his friend, the artist got upon his feet. For a moment his head swam and he might have fallen had not the Countess, who was watching him closely, thrown her arm about his shoulders.

"Do you feel any stronger now?" asked Mr. Smalley.

"Oh, I am all right!" answered Deane irritably. "Just a bit unsteady. I must have lost quite a lot of blood."

"Somebody smashed you in the head with a bottle of wine," said Mr. Smalley, "and cut an artery in your forehead. We had a hard time to stop the leak."

"How *can* you be so heartless!" cried the Countess indignantly. "Have you no sympathy?"

"Too much sympathy is not good for a young man," replied Mr. Smalley enigmatically. "Otherwise I should have kissed his *other* hand——"

"Will you please stop talking absurdities

and help me to get him into the car?" exclaimed the Countess, stamping her foot angrily.

Scorning all asistance, which was none the less rendered him, Deane crawled into the limousine and slumped down in the corner.

"Shall I get inside also?" asked Mr. Smalley. "I can help to steady him when the car sways."

"No," said the Countess decidedly. "You can get up in front. *You* would not care if his head went through the side of the *carrosserie,* and, besides, he needs room to stretch out."

"But where is he going to rest his head?" persisted Mr. Smalley solicitously.

"I will take care of his head," replied the Countess, in a tone somewhat more sharp than the innocent query appeared to warrant. "You climb up in front and ask the chauffeur to show you how to start a big car without breaking something, Cousin Sam!"

"Pax—oh, pax!" cried Smalley, hurriedly complying with the girl's suggestion.

The Countess slammed the door and turned the latch. The chauffeur started the

motor, climbed aboard and the car forged slowly ahead. The artist wedged himself back in his corner and closed his eyes, for his head was still giddy.

"Lean against me," said the Countess, a trifle breathlessly, "and rest your head on my arm."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," muttered the artist. "Suppose the thing begins to bleed again?"

"Do you think that I am afraid of blood when my—my friend is hurt? I will tighten the compress if it does!"

"I wish you would loosen the beastly thing!" said Deane fretfully. "It hurts like the mischief!"

"Poor fellow!" murmured the Countess softly. "I don't dare loosen it; you haven't any more blood to spare. Come—don't be silly; stretch out on the seat as much as you can and let me steady your head in my arms."

The chauffeur was driving fast through the darkness, and the swaying of the car was throwing the artist's head against the cushions in a way that was intolerable. But, like

most men who have been always blessed with robust health, he had, or thought he had, an intense distaste for being coddled. If there was any coddling to be done Mr. Deane had always preferred to do it himself.

"I'm all right, thanks," he answered, a bit gruffly.

"Nonsense!" said the Countess. "Your poor head is bobbing about like a duck on the water. Come, don't act like a cross baby." She placed her arms gently but firmly about the shoulders of the astonished young man, turned him sidewise upon the seat, then drew him down until he was lying upon his side with his bandaged head held firmly in her arms.

"Is that better?" she asked.

"Lots. But it will tire you out."

"I don't tire easily. Things never tire me, only people—like Cousin Sam!"

"Sam likes to be an ass sometimes," murmured Deane. "He does it on purpose. You must not mind——"

"Don't talk!" said the Countess. "Rest. Try to get a nap."

The artist tried obediently, but either the

change of position or some other subtle cause had so restored him that the need of sleep became quite superfluous. His violent headache gradually subsided, and he became rapidly more and more appreciative of the fact that the Countess was gently stroking that part of his head not covered by the compress.

"Countess?" he asked presently.

"Yes? Oh, I thought you were asleep."

"You must be tired—are you not?"

"No. Go to sleep!"

"I can't."

"Why not? Does the head still hurt you?" She leaned over him, and Deane could see her great eyes glowing through the dusk of the limousine. She had flung off the Breton coiffe, and a stray wisp of her hair fell across his cheek.

"No," said he; "it—is not that."

"What is it, then?"

"Thinking too hard."

"What about?"

"You."

"But you must not. I am safe now," the girl's voice softened, "thanks to you."

"It was just as much Sam."

"Oh, was it, indeed? Was it Sam who backed that great brute against the wall and told him to give me up or"—the Countess' low voice grew fierce—"or he would never leave the room alive? And when he refused, was it Sam who said to"—she shuddered—"to heat the poker—tell me, *would* you have used the poker?" The Countess shuddered again.

"Oh, probably not. Sam is a great talker, isn't he?"

"That is just it. *He* really tells things—and to hear *you* talk one would think that you were meant to sit on a silk cushion with a pink bow tied around your neck! Fancy my wondering if you could fight!"

"I can't. Sam is the scrapper. If I could fight I would not be lying here like a sick canary with my feathers ruffed up. Sam did all the fighting, but *he's* not hurt."

"You must go to sleep!" said the Countess. "I forgot."

"Can't."

"Why not? What are you thinking of now?"

"Still of you."

There was a moment's pause. Then the Countess said softly:

"There is nothing more to think about—is there? If your friends can't harbor me, and they really should not, I know of several places——"

"It's not that. The Cuttings will never let you go."

"What is it, then?"

Deane's heart beat wildly, but for the first time in his life words utterly failed him. There was another pause.

"Then there is nothing," said the Countess firmly. "You have been talking too much and are getting excited. I can feel your heart beat. Go to sleep, there's a—a——"

"A what?"

The girl did not reply. The big car tore on through the night, rocking and swaying, its single, blazing eye but half-seeing the road. Trees and houses flitted by. The powerful motor ran with the rhythm of a solar system.

Presently the artist sighed deeply.

"In pain?" whispered the Countess, bending lower.

"In a way—yes."

"The head hurting again?"

"The head? Oh, dear, no! I'd quite forgotten that I had one."

"What then?"

"Do—do you really want to know?"

There was a pause; then: "Yes," softly.

"Then—then—Countess?"

"Yes?" The mass of hair drooped lower, and again a wisp trailed across the face of the artist, and, once again, words which had risen so effervescently to his lips so many times before shamelessly deserted him.

"Aren't you getting tired?" he asked.

"No!" replied the Countess, a bit shortly.

"Let me sit up!" exclaimed the artist desperately, attributing his unaccustomed embarrassment and lack of courage to the helplessness of his position.

"No. Keep still. You will start it bleeding again if you wriggle!"

"But you *must* be tired!"

"But I am not! The car is running smoothly now. Why don't you go to sleep?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes—if you know yourself."

"Well, then——"

"Yes?"

"Then—Countess——"

"Stop 'Countessing' me. My name is Diane. Call me that if you like. I think that you have earned the right; don't you?"

"I don't think that I've earned anything but hard names, but, I must say, I like Diane better than Countess."

"Very well—why can't you sleep?"

"Can't you guess?"

"I don't *want* to guess. I want you to tell me. Don't squirm so! You are harder to hold than a fox-terrier!"

"Well, then, Count—I mean Diane—I —I love you!"

There was a silence which lasted for at least ten seconds; then, to the utter confusion of the artist, the Countess leaned back against the cushions and began to laugh. Spontaneous as her mirth appeared, however, the ear of the young man was quick to detect the falsity of its note.

"What are you laughing at?" he de-

manded, at the same time struggling to sit upright. But a man curled up on his side in the limousine of a swiftly-moving motor-car, with a strong and determined young lady gripping his head in both arms, is about as powerless as a cab-horse down on the asphalt.

"Stop wriggling!" cried the Countess, still laughing.

"Then stop laughing," replied Deane. "I must say, I don't see——"

"Poor fellow!" interrupted the Countess. "Do you always feel that you have to say that? Or were you merely taking mental notes——"

"Hush, Diane!" The breathless quaver which gave the lie to the mockery in the girl's voice imbued the artist with a sudden strength.

He freed his head from the Countess' arms and sat upright.

"Don't be silly, Diane!" he said, taking both of her hands firmly in his. "I have loved you from the moment that I first saw you digging *échille* in the sand, and the only wonder is that I have been able to keep from

telling you so half a dozen times. I did not because—well—it did not seem quite fair—too much like asking a reward, you know, for what should have been done anyway out of mere chivalry. Now it is hard because—oh, because you might not care to hear it. Do you?"

The Countess Diane tried feebly to withdraw her hands, but failed. Then she tried somewhat breathlessly to speak, but failed again.

"I don't suppose that it is right for me to tell you how I love you, even now," continued Deane; "because, after all, you have only known me for a day—twenty-four hours! It seems longer than that—and for all you know of me I might be anything: an opium fiend, or an ex-convict, or a card-sharp, or——"

"Hush—oh, hush!" cried a low, sweet voice. "You know that I would trust you absolutely—and—and I will believe you—if you tell me that you really, really love me!"

"Diane!" cried the artist. "I adore you! I am mad about you! That is what makes it so hard to tell you, dear——"

"And you are not saying it because—because——" The Countess was leaning toward him, her lips quite close to his ear, for the car was at a high rate of speed, the hum of swiftly-moving machinery loud, and her own voice a trifle faint. Before she could finish her speech there was a sudden lurch of the car, or it may have been natural affinity, or, perhaps, some swift movement on the part of the young man; at any rate, the artist found his arms full to overflowing of the Countess, the answer to whose question was given after a manner of such deep and heartfelt sincerity that her last, lingering doubt was swept away in a wild ecstasy of conviction.

Presently the Countess observed with a sigh which had in it nothing of sadness, but was rather an effort to supply her system with the requisite oxygen:

"*Alors,* if you can still love me, hideous as I am *en Bretonne,* perhaps you will tire of me less soon than you have of the others!"

"Darling, there are no others! There never were! I did not love them—I only painted them!"

"And I suppose you will have to keep on painting them?"

"And loving you!"

"If you ever loved another woman," said Diane fiercely, "do you know what I would do?"

"Kill her?"

"Yes. And then——"

"Kill me?"

"No," with a sob, "myself! Isn't it p-p-pathetic——"

"Don't you think that we are going dangerously fast?" asked Diane presently. "We must be almost there!"

Deane rapped sharply on the glass.

"For Heaven's sake, slow down!" he cried.

"There is no danger!" shouted Mr. Smalley in answer.

"Perhaps there's not—but if you felt as I do I guess you would want to take it a bit easily."

"Not a doubt of it!" assented Mr. Smalley, and even in the darkness his friend could see him grin.

The car slowed down.

"Only think!" whispered the Countess. "We will soon have to separate!"

"We must be together as much as we can until then!" said Mr. Deane, putting the principle into immediate action.

"How soon," said the Countess, when opportunity offered, "do you expect to start upon your tour with Cousin Sam?"

"That is all off now."

"Why?"

"Because it would interfere with another tour which I expect to make in about a month."

"Another tour? Who with?"

"My wife."

The Countess breathed quickly. "Are you going to be married as soon as that?" she asked, with as much naïveté as a very rapid respiration would permit.

"I would not wait that long," said Mr. Deane, "if it were not necessary for my fiancée to first come of age."

"But don't you think," suggested the Countess, "that a little more time might be required thoroughly to convince yourself that you are truly in love with her?"

"I wish," said the young man sadly, "that I could be equally sure that she were as much in love with me——"

"Isn't it wonderful!" whispered the Countess, her lips a quarter of an inch from the artist's ear.

"What, Diane?"

"That two people can love each other so——"

"I think," said a dry, sarcastic voice, "that it is even more wonderful how a third person can be so utterly ignored as to——"

"Sam!" cried the artist, awakening to the fact that the car had stopped and that his friend was standing beside it with the latch of the open door in his hand. "You shameless old eavesdropper!"

"If you call stopping the car, hitting the horn, getting out, opening the door and announcing three times that we have arrived, eavesdropping," answered Mr. Smalley, "then I plead guilty! Are you feeling a little better?"

His grin clove the darkness like a searchlight.

"Better!" echoed the rapturous artist "I

never felt so well in all of my life—my hitherto worthless life. Go in and stir up the Cuttings, Sam, and tell them that I crave their hospitality for my fiancée, the Countess Diane Roubanoff, and myself."

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"Nothing," cried Mrs. "Jim," when she and her husband had been put entirely *en rapport* with the situation, "could have been more excellently timed!"

The pretty young matron, her husband, and Mr. Deane were holding a council of war. On the arrival of the refugees the Countess had been petted and promptly put to bed; the unhappy Mr. Smalley had been dispatched to return the borrowed car with such explanations as might occur to his ingenious mind, while Mr. Deane, his head having been dressed by a surgeon, had been also put to bed, but had stubbornly declined to sleep until the immediate future had been disposed of.

"Why well timed?" he asked. "I say, Edith—did you ever see such eyes and hair?"

"Because Jim and I are going over to England for Henley week, and after that

we are going to tour Scotland. We are taking the car with us."

"Well?"

"The Countess shall come, too, of course. We were wondering who to ask. Before we return she will have come of age and can marry you or any one else she pleases."

"She would never be safe here in France," said Mr. Cutting, who had won his own bride while hounded by the French police.

"What a pity that you should have promised Sam Smalley to go touring with him, Archie," said Mrs Cutting demurely, "as otherwise we might have asked you, too. However, I know of an awfully attractive guardsman——"

"Oh, rot!" growled Mr. Deane. "Of course I am going with you, Edith. My tour with Sam is all off. He's gone and smashed up his car!"

. . . . .

Six weeks later found a small runabout car skipping merrily over the Devon hills. On the luggage-carrier behind there was lashed a gleamingly-new sole-leather trunk. Driving the car was a handsome young man

with a radiant face and a clearly-defined and recent scar across his forehead, while on the seat beside him was a very pretty girl with sapphire eyes, enough red hair for two, and a great many very white teeth. She had been a wife for exactly two hours and eighteen minutes, according to the auto-watch which hung just in front of her.

"Are we almost there—husband?" she asked with a breathless little laugh.

"Yes, Diane. It is the dearest little place. Years ago I used to come here to paint. Are you tired, dear?"

"Tired? No, but the road is so steep, and one really should not try to drive even a little car like this with only one hand—even for a minute—and—and—no, dearest, you *must* look where you are going, or else—stop! Just think how awful it would be if anything should happen to us now!"

THE END